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New York

President: Mr. Gurirab ..... (Namibia)

The meeting was called to order at 10.10 a.m.

Agenda item 9 *(continued)*

General debate

The President: I first give the floor to the Deputy Prime Minister of Swaziland, His Excellency Mr. Arthur Khoza.

Mr. Khoza (Swaziland): I am honoured to address the General Assembly at its fifty-fourth session as a representative of His Majesty the King of Swaziland. I bring with me from the Kingdom of Swaziland warmest greetings and best wishes to all our fellow members from His Majesty King Mswati III, Her Majesty the Indlovukazi, the Government and the whole Swazi nation.

The Kingdom of Swaziland congratulates you, Sir, on your election to the presidency of the General Assembly at this session. We are especially proud that a fellow southern African has been elected to this demanding position, and we are confident that your diplomatic skills and experience will help you guide and lead this Assembly towards the successful conclusion of its deliberations.

We should also like to commend the skilful leadership of the fifty-third session by your predecessor Mr. Didier Opertti.

We are meeting at a time of great challenges for the United Nations. The membership is faced with a number of issues concerning the very shape of our Organization and the scope of operations that we choose to undertake. The Kingdom of Swaziland believes that we are fortunate indeed to have at this time a Secretary-General who commands such universal respect and who possesses the qualities of determination, enthusiasm and leadership that are so necessary as we chart our course for the future. We call on him and on the staff of the United Nations to keep up their good work in the service of all Member States.

The Kingdom of Swaziland believes that the Secretary-General and his staff can best be supported by our continuing commitment to meeting our financial obligations in full and on time. We call on all our fellow Members to comply by honouring their obligations so that our Organization can have sufficient resources with which to cope with the widening scope of its operations and to meet the expectations of us all.

The Kingdom of Swaziland is delighted to extend a warm welcome to our Organization's three new Members: the nation States of Tonga, Nauru and Kiribati. Their admission is further confirmation of our respect for the principles of universality and representation, as contained in the founding Charter of the United Nations.

But even as we welcome these new Members, the Kingdom of Swaziland is conscious that the principle of universality is not applied equally to others who feel excluded from the activities of our Organization. I refer

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to the 22 million people of the Republic of China on Taiwan, who believe that they are being denied their right to representation in the United Nations. The Government and the people of the Republic of China on Taiwan have shown their willingness and capacity to contribute actively to global development and peace, through disaster relief and development support to many countries and regions. The Republic of China on Taiwan is clearly a peace-loving nation, and is highly developed in all economic, social and political spheres.

It is the view of the Kingdom of Swaziland that international peace and security and equitable development for all mankind, can be achieved only through the inclusion of all the people of the world in the one truly global development Organization. We therefore support the call from an increasing number of Member States for the establishment of a working group by the General Assembly to examine the exceptional international situation relating to the Republic of China on Taiwan and to ensure that the fundamental right of its 22 million people to participate in the work and activities of the United Nations is fully respected. We recognize that, as has been the case in some other nations, the matter of reunification is for the Chinese people themselves.

The history of the twentieth century will have further evidence to support the belief that man apparently and surprisingly cannot live peacefully side by side with his neighbour, nor in harmony with nature and his environment. Despite the many remarkable achievements of the last 99 years, notably in the collapse of ideological and political colonialism and in the fields of technology, science and medicine, it will be, in the end, by world wars, environmental degradation and the emergence of global epidemics that this century will be remembered.

The Kingdom of Swaziland believes that the promotion of sustainable international peace and security must be the main priority for the United Nations, because it is clear that our collective aim of raising the living standards of our peoples is possible only in conditions of global stability and with nations living in harmony alongside one another.

It has long been recognized that the greatest threat to global peace lies in the continuing spread of weapons of mass destruction. Our failure so far as an Organization to have true commitment from all Members to arms control and nuclear disarmament has meant that we enter the next millennium with this threat still overshadowing all matters of international relations.

The Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons and the Comprehensive Nuclear-Test-Ban Treaty are designed as essential first steps towards a world free from the danger that such weapons pose. We clearly need to find a way to strengthen the non-proliferation regime, and also to prevent the flow of conventional weapons and anti-personnel landmines into zones of conflict.

The Kingdom of Swaziland therefore calls upon the Conference on Disarmament to implement the proposal of the Non-Aligned Movement by establishing as its highest priority an ad hoc committee to begin negotiations on a programme for the complete elimination of nuclear weapons, within a time-bound framework. We also urge those States with nuclear weapons to implement faithfully both the letter and spirit of all agreements relating to the non-proliferation of nuclear weapons and nuclear disarmament.

Whilst the possibilities of global conflict have diminished since the end of the cold-war era, it is a fact that there has been a corresponding increase in the incidence of internal conflicts and cross-border disturbances arising from a variety of causes, including ethnic and religious confrontation. The Kingdom of Swaziland believes that the emphasis of the United Nations in dealing with this increase of internal and cross-border crises should be on the introduction of an effective mechanism of preventive diplomacy to stop incidents from escalating out of control. This has been the focus of regional organizations of which the Kingdom of Swaziland is a member, such as the Common Market for Eastern and Southern Africa (COMESA), the Southern African Development Community (SADC) and the Organization of African Unity (OAU). We believe that, while recognizing the overall responsibility of the United Nations towards global peace, the regional organizations must take the lead as the building blocks towards stability and closer cooperation.

The past year in international affairs has been a mix of progress in some areas of past conflict and the continuation or emergence of crises in many others. The United Nations has quite correctly become involved in trying to help resolve each of these situations, to a greater or lesser degree, and the Kingdom of Swaziland commends its efforts and those of all who have played a similar role.

The Kingdom of Swaziland recognizes the recent progress made by Israelis and Palestinians towards the

implementation of the Wye River peace accord. This has been a most encouraging step towards lasting peace in the Middle East region and we applaud the courage and commitment of the leadership of both sides towards achieving this aim.

The crisis in the former Yugoslavia earlier this year gave us cause for great concern, especially in the light of the threat of the conflict's spreading to other Balkan States. We pray that the recent return to relative stability will lead to lasting peace in that troubled region and that the wishes of the people for their future will be the guiding principle in any long-term dispensation.

We have viewed with concern the events in East Timor following the referendum on independence and we fully support the decision of the United Nations to accede to the request of the Indonesian Government for the urgent deployment of a peacekeeping force. We appeal to all involved to restore calm to the situation and to respect the wishes of the people of East Timor for their future.

We have watched with equal concern the apparent setback in the peace process in Northern Ireland. We support the efforts of the British and Irish Governments to create the right conditions of trust and confidence, in which the people of Northern Ireland can decide their future for themselves. We urge all parties involved to exercise restraint and to rediscover the spirit of compromise and reconciliation that characterized the original Good Friday Agreement.

Closer to home, on our own continent of Africa, the past year has given cause for some optimism in a number of areas; but in others, the tale is all too depressingly familiar.

We welcome with great relief the signing of the Peace Agreement between the warring factions in Sierra Leone and we appeal to both sides to abide by the terms of the settlement so that their people may benefit from the dividend of peace after so many years of suffering and lack of development.

The continuing border dispute between Ethiopia and Eritrea has unsettled all in the Horn of Africa and we applaud the decision of both countries to agree to mediation efforts between them by the United Nations and the OAU. We pray that this sensible move may lead to a peaceful settlement of the crisis.

The recent signing of an Agreement by all parties to the conflict in the Democratic Republic of the Congo has encouraged all of us in the region. We hope that there will be commitment by all signatories to the terms of the ceasefire and that a lasting solution may be found that will allow the Congolese people to develop their great potential in peace. This last success is all the more encouraging for those of us in the SADC region, since it came about through the combined efforts of a number of SADC member States. In a similar vein, heightened tension between two of our members, Angola and Zambia, was able to be defused before the situation could escalate into a crisis.

Both of these situations point to the acceptance of responsibility by our member States for resolving regional difficulties ourselves. Of course, this does not preclude our welcome to the willingness of others, such as the OAU, the United Nations and individual countries that wish to be involved, especially in the provision of training and material and financial support. But we firmly believe in the principle that African problems require african solutions and we are determined to come up with the means and mechanisms to abide by it.

On the negative side, the continent has seen the continuation of two crises that are having an especially damaging effect on the lives of the people involved and that we believe require the urgent attention of the United Nations.

The first concerns the deteriorating situation in Angola, where peace remains as elusive as ever. We call on the leadership of UNITA to respect the terms of the Lusaka Protocol and to recognize the need to use it as the starting point in the search for lasting peace and national healing. We appeal to the international community to continue to support the efforts of SADC and all of us who are involved in the quest for an end to the suffering of the Angolan people.

The situation is Somalia, while possessing different characteristics, has the same distressing effect on the people of that unfortunate country. The fact is that the division and lack of any legitimate central authority in their country has deprived Somalis not only of peace and the chance for development, but also of a voice of appeal in regional and international forums.

The time has surely come for the United Nations to show real commitment to finding a solution to the Somalia crisis, in the same way that we are expending a

great deal of effort and resources in crisis situations in other parts of the world. The Somali people deserve the same concern and respect for their future from the rest of the world as those in countries with perhaps greater global recognition and resources.

The complex challenges facing the world today lend greater significance and urgency to the initiatives for reform of our Organization. The Kingdom of Swaziland believes that these reforms are essential if the United Nations is to retain the global credibility and authority that are so necessary in its operations.

Recent history has shown clearly that the traditional mechanisms for harmonizing global relations and conflict resolution, in particular, are no longer effective, and the United Nations is in real danger of losing the confidence of its Members in these areas.

Our aim must be to transform our Organization into a structure that is truly representative of all our Members and that is transparent and efficient in its operations, while remaining consistent to the purposes and principles of our founding Charter.

We believe that the priority should be to achieve balanced representation in the principal organs of the United Nations. The Security Council, as a particular example, requires reform in order to strengthen its legitimacy. Its composition must reflect the plurality and diversity of the membership of the United Nations, with due regard for the profound geopolitical changes in recent history.

The Kingdom of Swaziland reaffirms its full support for the African position on reform of the Security Council, namely, two permanent seats for Africa to be shared on a rotational basis, as well as three non-permanent seats, and a re-examination of the exercise of veto power.

It is a fact that the majority of Member States concur with this need for reform of the Security Council and that all agree on the urgency attached to the matter. Yet there has been very little progress made so far by the Open-ended Working Group established to address this vital issue. We are concerned at this lack of progress and would urge the Working Group to overcome whatever obstacles remain to a resolution that meets Members' demands for fairness and urgency.

Turning now to the question of the Millennium Assembly, to be convened next year, the Kingdom of Swaziland is encouraged by the emerging consensus among Member States on the need to articulate a vision for the international community in the year 2000.

We support the Secretary-General's theme of the United Nations in the twenty-first century and the proposed sub-topics for the Millennium Assembly. Of these, we believe the closely related sub-topics of peace and security, on the one hand, and development and poverty eradication, on the other, to be of the highest priority in the context of the overall theme.

Future global stability depends on the ability of national Governments to increase the momentum for economic development and their capacity to improve the delivery of job creation and essential social services, such as health and education.

We believe that poverty eradication can be achieved only through the promotion of an accelerated pace of growth and development in the developing countries. There can be no doubt that, to achieve this aim, we need the support of the rest of the international community, and this support can best be coordinated by the United Nations.

One key factor in the achievement of our aim of poverty eradication is the concept of the globalization and liberalization of the global economy. The conclusion of the Uruguay Round, on the one hand, promised to open up enormous trade opportunities in the sale and movement of goods and services, but on the other it threatened the fragile economies of those countries that had not achieved the state of preparation to take full advantage.

The continent of Africa, in particular, continues to face a multitude of problems as we struggle to settle into the new world order. Many of us are undertaking painful reforms of existing structures in order to respond to the demands of globalization and liberalization. The implementation of structural adjustment programmes, often on the instructions of the Bretton Woods institutions, is having a severely adverse impact on the social welfare of many African countries, with devastating effects on the quality of life of our people. We can see the result of these effects in many countries, where a decrease in expenditure on social programmes has led to heightened internal tension and instability.

Clearly, globalization and liberalization as concepts have much to recommend them. Undoubtedly, they hold

the key to an economic future of equal opportunity for all countries. But we are saying that they need to take into account the unequal starting points of each country: that some are better prepared than others to take full advantage of the opportunities they offer and that many of us may well lose any hope of catching up. We are seeing the very sovereignty of countries being eroded by the power of multinational companies. True economic power is being held in fewer and fewer hands, and the developing countries are becoming further marginalized. Social problems increase as people lose jobs and capital and currency values are controlled elsewhere.

The developing countries cannot wish away globalization, but we would wish it to adopt a more human face, one that recognizes and makes allowances for the fundamental inequalities between the richer and the poorer nations of the world and makes concessions to allow us the opportunity to take full advantage of its opportunities in due course.

For our part in the Kingdom of Swaziland, we are aggressively pursuing political, economic, social and institutional reforms that will have a major impact on all aspects of national life, in accordance with the wishes and expectations of the Swazi people themselves.

This year, we launched the national development strategy, a people-driven vision for the long term, providing a planning framework for government action priorities for the next 25 years. The core aim of the strategy is to achieve a sustainable increase in the standard of living of all Swazis, with particular emphasis on eliminating poverty from our society. Our priority is to create the conditions for a vibrant economy and to increase our capacity to provide our people with a high level of human development.

This long-term blueprint has been used as the basis for two short- and medium-term programmes of action by the Government that are linked to timetables and are fully accountable for results.

The economic and social reform agenda is a performance management tool that identifies priority actions and keeps government performance under close, public scrutiny and the public sector management programme designed to improve service delivery and cost-effectiveness in the public sector. We believe that these initiatives, with the wishes of the people at their heart, will provide us with the right conditions in which to prosper and to achieve our human development objectives.

We have very much appreciated the support of the United Nations in formulating the strategy. The national development strategy should, from now on, form the priority target for all development support from United Nations agencies. We would wish the same from the international development finance institutions. We share the concern of many fellow Member States in the developing world that too often these institutions' target for support is not in tune with the wishes of the country involved and that the process of project design and approval is painfully slow. We look forward to working with the United Nations Development Programme and the international finance institutions to design projects that coincide with the wishes of our own people, and within a time-frame that meets our expectations of speedy implementation.

In 1996, the Kingdom of Swaziland embarked on a review of its Constitution with the establishment of a commission that was tasked with collecting the views of all Swazis on all aspects of the present Constitution. We have kept the General Assembly fully informed on the progress of this commission each year, and I am delighted to report that the people's recommendations on the Constitution will be presented to the nation at the end of this year. The process will then move forward to the drafting of these recommendations into a formal document that will be confirmed by the people themselves, before final ratification.

Throughout the process of constitutional review, we have been guided by the principle of involving all Swazis in the drafting of what will be the Kingdom's defining document. Consultation with our people on all important matters is a principle that we have followed throughout our history, and is one that has helped us to maintain the peace and stability with which we have always been blessed.

I have spoken at length about the efforts we in the Kingdom of Swaziland are making to improve the lives of our people. And yet, all our plans and all our good intentions are meaningless in the face of the danger that threatens to overwhelm our nation. I am referring, of course, to the HIV/AIDS crisis, which is already having a severe impact on the lives of many Swazi families and which undermines all our hopes for a future of prosperity and security for all our people. We are facing up to the fact that the Kingdom of Swaziland has one of the highest rates of HIV infection in the world, and our hospitals and clinics are stretched to the limit of capacity as a result. We are making every effort to halt the spread of the

deadly disease. But it is an uphill struggle and involves us in bringing about a wholesale change in attitude and moral behaviour.

Our chief concern is to promote awareness of the danger and of the preventive measures available. Our resources are limited, and we need the continuing support of the international community in our efforts to reverse the downward trend. This appeal was repeatedly made at the recent Eleventh International Conference on AIDS and STDs in Africa held in Lusaka. We therefore join other Member States in a similar predicament in appealing to the United Nations to coordinate an international response to the crisis. The very future of our nation, and that of many others, depends on those with the technical and financial resources joining forces with us to stem the deadly tide.

In conclusion, I should like to take this opportunity to express the deep gratitude of Their Majesties, the Government and the whole Swazi nation, to the United Nations Development Programme and all its sister agencies, for the many programmes of assistance undertaken in the Kingdom of Swaziland since our independence.

We believe that the United Nations, as the one truly global development Organization, remains the only hope for overcoming the many complex challenges facing the world today. Despite the setbacks and obstacles to achieving our collective aims, there can be no doubt that the world would be a more troubled place without the combined efforts of all of us here.

The Kingdom of Swaziland therefore takes great pride in reaffirming its commitment to the principles and ideals contained in the United Nations Charter, and we ask Almighty God to watch over and guide us in the challenging times ahead for our Organization.

The President: I now call on the Minister for Foreign Affairs of Trinidad and Tobago, His Excellency The Honourable Ralph Maraj.

Mr. Maraj (Trinidad and Tobago): I wish to congratulate you on your election to the presidency of the General Assembly at its final session of the twentieth century and would like to assure you of the fullest cooperation of the delegation of Trinidad and Tobago as you discharge the duties entrusted to you by the Member States of the United Nations. We would also like to commend your predecessor, Mr. Didier Opertti of Uruguay, for the very capable and distinguished manner in which he guided the Assembly's work during its fifty-third session.

There is only one real purpose to government. It is to serve the people, to protect them and to improve the quality of their lives. In their enlightened self-interest, nations also come together to serve that end by trying to create a better world, one in which their own citizens can interact with others and benefit from relationships in the pursuit of their fulfilment. At both the national and global levels, the human being is supposed to be at the centre of the purpose, processes and policies of governance. It is the foundation of democratic civilization to create the conditions that give the individual the opportunity for fulfilment.

We need to assess our nations and our world in the light of that original intention as we approach the twenty-first century.

The present global picture proves that much went wrong during this century. The economic models of the century have failed to create economic and social justice. The central planning of Communism was disastrous, suffocating human development by stifling initiatives and freedoms and creating oppressive authoritarian regimes. The Big Government of the centre-left era was bungling and bureaucratic, killing entrepreneurial initiative and generating a dependency syndrome, and was imperfect in its delivery as the major social and economic actor. Now we are in the era of the market, of deregulation and borderlessness, and the question still is: what have we achieved?

At the turn of the century, we have 1.3 billion people in the category of the poor, earning less than $1 dollar per day. More than 880 million people lack access to health services, 2.6 billion people lack access to basic sanitation and 1.5 billion people are not expected to survive to age 60. The number of malnourished is 840 million people, nearly 20 per cent of whom are children. One of the most tragic situations as we approach the end of the century is that 70 per cent of the world's poor are women. From 1990 to 1997 the number of people infected with HIV/AIDS more than doubled, with the majority of victims in the developing world.

Ironically, in this much-heralded information age, 75 million people are estimated to be illiterate, with the majority also in the developing world. In addition to the problem of illiteracy, the education system in most

developing countries is producing unskilled and unemployable young people.

Five billion of the world's 6 billion people live in the developing world, but most of the resources are concentrated in the developed countries. Twenty per cent of the world's richest countries share 86 per cent of the world's gross domestic product, 82 per cent of exports of goods and services and 68 per cent of foreign direct investment.

If there is any demonstration of the inequality that exists and how most human beings have been marginalized as we approach the end of the twentieth century, the following is a striking example: the assets of the three richest people are more than the combined gross national product of all of the least developed countries; the assets of the 200 richest people are more than the combined income of 41 per cent of the world's people; and a yearly contribution of 1 per cent of the wealth of the 200 richest people could provide universal access to primary education for all.

There is an even darker side to the picture. As we span the far reaches of history, and especially in this century, we see that very often the individual in society has been the victim of political and economic forces beyond his control. He has suffered the horrendous consequences of ethnic, cultural and religious intolerance. It is the individual and the family that have suffered the most from the devastating effects of wars, genocide and ethnic cleansing.

In our century alone, we have witnessed the tragedy of two world wars, which have resulted in the loss of a countless number of lives, the separation of families and the loss of hope for many. We have seen the untold human misery and pain of the Holocaust, the injustices and suffering of apartheid and the callousness of regimes which have unleashed acts of unspeakable horror on their citizens. Throughout this century, we have been shocked by news and television images of the harsh realities endured by the victims of such horrors in Europe, Cambodia, Rwanda, Bosnia and the former Yugoslavia, to name a few. And, sadly, we have realized that the very scientific and technological advances which were intended for the service of humanity can be turned to evil ends in the service of the destruction of humanity.

Nevertheless, in the midst of one of the darkest chapters of the twentieth century, there is hope in the fact that such evils have stirred the conscience of the international community to strengthen the rule of law, to address situations such as these and to ensure respect for fundamental human rights.

It is because of this recognition that we have today the most recent instrument, the Rome Statute of the International Criminal Court. This Statute is the result of a call made in 1989 by Mr. Arthur N.R. Robinson, President of the Republic of Trinidad and Tobago, for the international community to renew its focus on the question of the establishment of an international criminal jurisdiction to deal with these atrocities, and also with crimes associated with the illicit drug trade, all of which have such a heavy impact on a Government's ability to address the fundamental needs of its citizens.

In addition to the establishment of the International Criminal Court, there is hope in the fact that the United Nations has made advances in the area of human rights. We have seen the adoption of several instruments, such as the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, which guarantee fundamental human rights, the Convention on the Rights of the Child, the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women and the International Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination. These reflect the commitments and obligations of the international community to improving the quality of life of the individual in the various sectors of society. But we must not pay lip-service to the principles enshrined in the international instruments that we have adopted; there is too much of a trend of paying lip-service. We need to take concrete action now.

Albert Camus, one of the distinguished writers of modern times noted that,

> "Probably every generation sees itself as charged with remaking the world. Mine, however, knows that its task will not be merely to remake the world. Its task is even greater: to keep the world from destroying itself."

There is no doubt that the task in the new century is to save the world from self-destruction, and the question is, what type of economic arrangement will ensure that salvation? Surely it cannot be one in which the few feast at the table, leaving mere crumbs for the majority. No one can be insulated from the catastrophe inherent in such a situation. Disease, terrorism, the drug trade, human enslavement, child labour and ecological disaster

will continue to be produced by a world bereft of economic and social justice. No fortress, whether economic or military, will be strong enough to insulate any country from the effects of such a situation. Some may not like it, and some tend to forget it; but it is one world that we live in, one globe that we share. We should take a lesson from nature itself, whose hot winds emanate from the Sahara in Africa, become hurricanes in their journey across the Atlantic and eventually devastate and desolate countries as far away as the Caribbean and North, Central and South America.

In this era of globalization, we have excellent opportunities to put in place new and innovative global structures that would make possible global solutions to ensure the social, economic and cultural security of the individual. The World Trade Organization (WTO) meeting in Seattle this year, the South Summit, the special sessions of the General Assembly to follow up of the World Summit for Social Development and the Fourth World Conference on Women and, indeed, the Millennium Assembly next year, provide ideal opportunities for the international community to respond to this coming crisis of mankind.

In the upcoming WTO Seattle meeting, it must be recognized that many of the measures which were supposed to be put in place in the new global trading system ushered in by the Uruguay Round have not been realized. Giving effect to those matters must therefore be the priority in any new round of WTO negotiations. In other words, implementation of commitments already made must be the emphasis.

In that process, we must recognize that a special category of States face peculiar disadvantages arising from the policy actions of the international community. These are the small and vulnerable States, of which the States of the Caribbean region make up a significant part. For these countries, the need to maintain the provisions for special and differential treatment in the present WTO Agreement is fundamental.

The liberalization of international trade under the WTO is a dynamic force for accelerating growth and development. The challenge for the next Ministerial Conference is to ensure resolute progress towards an open, free and fair international trading system in which benefits are equitably distributed. Developed countries must demonstrate an unequivocal commitment to opening their markets to exports of developing countries to enable them to achieve sustained levels of economic development. The disconnection between developments in the WTO and the development process at the national level in developing countries must be arrested. The rules-based system of the WTO, which aims to promote free and fair trade, must do just that. The idea of the level playing field, we must remember, is a dangerous myth, and if it is allowed to hold sway it will further the pauperization of hundreds of millions of people all over the world.

Policies developed and promoted by international financial and monetary institutions such as the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund (IMF) must have as their ultimate goal the transformation of societies aimed at achieving a higher degree of social equity and justice within the global economy. The World Bank and the IMF must apply a set of criteria broader than per capita income when considering finance and development assistance, in view of our susceptibility to external economic shocks and natural disasters.

We are heartened by the highly successful Commonwealth ministerial mission on small island States undertaken by the Heads of Government in July 1998, from which an agreement has been secured for the establishment of a Commonwealth/World Bank task force. The World Bank is now developing a strategy, which we hope will be approved by its board of Executive Directors, to reorient its assistance for small States on the basis of a strategic assessment of their vulnerability, constraints and needs. Other financial institutions and development institutions should adopt similar initiatives. The governance of the supranational global actors therefore has to be reinvented with human development and equity as imperatives.

A new global partnership of developing countries must be forged with the financial institutions and the developed world to place financing for development on a sound and predictable level. The economic foundation laid by the policy prescriptions of structural adjustment remains questionable in terms of their potential to generate and sustain long-term economic growth. The international financial architecture must therefore be compatible with and complementary to real development.

National Governments cannot be exonerated from their responsibilities. There are too many countries in the world whose major problem is the imperfections of their own Governments. Many who speak about marginalization are themselves alienating their own populations, and some who lament global poverty are themselves pauperizing their own citizens through their own inadequacies. We cannot call for a reformation

without reforming ourselves. Do we all place our people at the centre of governance? Are we using our resources well and for the benefit of our populations who elected us to serve? We have a responsibility to re-invent our governance at home as part of the global transformation that we demand.

The key question that the Member States of the United Nations face in the twenty-first century is whether the United Nations will become an Organization that can deal effectively with all forms of injustices to humankind. We recall your words, Sir, in your opening statement to the current session of the General Assembly:

> "The aspirations, hopes and expectations of the world's peoples are high as they anticipate the future. They yearn for a world that is peaceful, humane and prosperous for all. Without the United Nations, such an inclusive world, led by inspiring leaders, cannot come about." *(A/54/PV.1)*

Trinidad and Tobago is committed to working with other countries of the world through the United Nations to fashion a global civilization that would, in the final analysis, be its own salvation and protection. We believe that the struggle for economic and social justice must start with ourselves and that democracy in each country must be an ever-deepening process which eventually liberates every single individual from want and places him or her in a position to pursue his or her own fulfilment while respecting the rights of others.

For us in Trinidad and Tobago everyone matters; every life is precious. This is the approach with which we come to the United Nations. All nations are important to us because every life in every country is precious. Trinidad and Tobago believes that the United Nations must come to understand again that it has been made for people — real people with flesh and blood and dreams; people who suffer pain and long for joy; people in cars on the street, in houses and hovels, in the cold or in sweltering heat, labouring in fields or offices, giving birth in hospitals and elsewhere; real people, Sir, who may never see you in that chair or me standing here, and if they do see us through the distance of television may be surprised and even disbelieve that we are doing this for them.

Is it not amazing how ritual and ceremony often become ends in themselves and either replace or obscure the real purpose? Trinidad and Tobago is heartened to sense that the United Nations is on a path of rediscovery of itself. It remains for us the only Organization where every individual may be represented and every voice heard, and where every opinion or idea could contend. Trinidad and Tobago pledges to work with others to take this Organization back to the people, to ensure that it works among them, in our collective efforts to save the world.

The President: Before I give the floor to the next speaker, I should like to inform delegations that we still have nine speakers remaining on the list for this morning. May I therefore again remind speakers that the General Assembly, in paragraph 21 of the annex to resolution 51/241, has indicated a voluntary guideline of up to 20 minutes for each statement in the general debate. I would like to appeal in earnest to speakers to make an extra effort in observing this 20 minute voluntary guideline so that we may conclude our work this morning in good time.

I now call on the Acting Minister for Foreign Affairs of the Islamic Republic of Afghanistan, His Excellency Mr. Abdullah Abdullah.

Mr. Abdullah (Afghanistan): Allow me to join the speakers preceding me to congratulate you, Sir, on your election as the President of the General Assembly at this session, the last of the present century. You surely are well versed in this high office through your experience with the United Nations, which will make of the centennial transition the launching platform for ever-more-fruitful future undertakings.

As we embark on the next century, the survival of the United Nations as an effective global institution comes into question. Can its role develop in the dawn of a new era? Or will it be more like a brilliant sunset? From the League of Nations to the United Nations, we have continuously pinned our hopes on the United Nations system, looking forward to a promising world ruled by law, governed by justice and blessed with peace.

However, the wide-ranging challenges — from questions relating to the maintenance of international peace and security, the eradication of poverty, sustainable development, economic growth and social progress to globalization in meaningful terms — all yet to be met and require firm resolve and certainly not mere rhetoric.

As crises continue to unfold throughout the world, we must ask, and answer, certain important questions. Why are threats to international peace and security variably defined and selectively determined from place to place? Why are State violators of the United Nations

Charter and international law, including the principle of non-interference, not brought to justice? Why are the instigators of "ethnic cleansing" and the perpetrators of genocide and of crimes against humanity not checked? Why is the fight against terrorism and narcotics so limited? And finally, where and when will gender apartheid come to an end?

We are convinced that those challenges and crises can best be dealt with if the United Nations actively functions within a framework similar to that of a state system. In this context, the United Nations Charter serves as an explicit and clear reference outlining the rights and responsibilities, in their entirety, of the Member States.

The advent of the new millennium marks the closing of the twentieth century. This is a time for the United Nations to pause and assess the gains and losses, and the successes and setbacks, it has experienced since its founding. The United Nations cannot truly embark on the next millennium until it has conclusively addressed the unfinished items on its agenda and the many existing global threats. One item on — and perhaps at the top of — that agenda, though it is far from finalized, relates to Pakistani hegemonic actions and that country's collusion with Talibanism in our region.

The Pakistani-Taliban occupation of land in Afghanistan represents a clear breach of a fundamental principle of international law, namely, the inadmissibility of the acquisition of territory by force. It is trans-border aggression. In addition, as the report of the Special Rapporteur (E/CN.4/1999/40), states in paragraph 18, the Taliban

> "continue to pursue policies which are in conflict with international human rights standards by which Afghanistan is bound as a party to the major international human rights instruments."

Furthermore, the Taliban has committed repeated war crimes and crimes against humanity, including forced deportation; the forced displacement of hundreds of thousands of people; the separation of thousands of men from their families; the widespread burning and leveling of houses and entire villages; the systematic destruction of the agricultural base and the irrigation systems, resulting in the loss of crops due for harvesting; and the execution of a scorched-earth policy. This has been particularly true, on a massive scale, in the Shamali Plains, following the July 19 Tashkent meeting of the group of "six plus two", and just this week in Khoja Ghar, in north-eastern Afghanistan. Their policies of genocide, gender apartheid, trafficking of women and girls, "ethnic cleansing", religious and sectarian extermination, rigid interpretation of religion, and the pursuit of a military solution spell out the Taliban actions in Afghanistan. They persist in their extremist agenda and advocacy of terrorism. The increase in drug production and trafficking, the Talibanization of the region and their denunciation of the international community continue unabated.

In sum, over 50 per cent of the Afghan population has been placed under virtual house arrest, and the entire population remains terrorized by the Taliban. The international community is greatly disturbed and concerned by the ominous nature of the Taliban agenda.

The responsibility of the much-discussed yet unresolved turmoil in Afghanistan continues to lie with the Pakistani leadership. Pakistan remains a proponent of arm-twisting, both nuclear and conventional, in South Asia. Afghanistan's Pakistani-dictated position of subordination, through the Taliban, has long undermined the peace process. Pakistan remains implacably opposed to the formation of a fully representative, multi-ethnic government in Afghanistan, insisting that the Taliban not relinquish power but gain further control. To this end, *inter alia*, thousands of Pakistani military personnel, members of the paramilitary, former commissioned officers and thousands of recruits and "volunteers" from Pakistani religious schools have been trained and dispatched into Afghanistan for what has been called a "jihad".

The remarks made on 30 July 1999 by Ambassador Lakhdar Brahimi, head of the United Nations Special Mission to Afghanistan (UNSMA), regarding the presence of thousands of armed Pakistani nationals fighting alongside the Taliban, provide credible testimony.

In this context, perhaps the article by retired Brigadier Usman Khalid, published in the Pakistani daily *The Frontier Post* of 29 September 1999, just three days ago, best spells out the Pakistani security dilemma in the form of a bold confession. It states that

> "the armed forces of Pakistan have been steadfast in playing their role in safeguarding the security of the country [Pakistan]. They have sought to safeguard the nuclear deterrent of Pakistan, resisted pressures to withdraw support from the mujahidin in Kashmir, and have been steadfast in their support to the

Taliban in Afghanistan. All of these are of vital importance to Pakistan's security and survival."

In fact, it is the intervention of Pakistan in Afghanistan, its support for the Taliban and its attempts to justify the Taliban's defiance of the aspirations of the international community, including reprehensible attempts at Taliban recognition, which has eroded Pakistan's reputation, causing its political isolation throughout the world. Those who are aware of the Afghan situation and the Afghan resolve to resist any foreign rule continue to be perplexed and puzzled in the face of the Pakistani position.

However, despite Talibanism and Pakistan's massive military intervention in Afghanistan — both of which represent obvious breaches of the United Nations Charter, international law and international humanitarian law — we are delighted to note that the United Nations, following years of skepticism or illusory thinking, appears, perhaps for the first time and only since the open escalation of foreign military involvement in Afghanistan, to have developed an in-depth perception of the longstanding bitter reality of the Pakistani role, its intervention, and the Taliban agenda in Afghanistan.

Mr. Li Hyong Chol (Democratic People's Republic of Korea), Vice-President, took the Chair.

Yet to our dismay, while this in-depth perception has been so long in developing, the plight of the Afghan nation has remained unresolved. It is doomed to the terrible predicament prevailing in many parts of Afghanistan: the inadmissible acquisition of territory by force and interference in its internal affairs. It is because of those fundamental questions that at the outset of my statement I raised the question of the survival of the United Nations as an effective global institution. Given its approach to Afghanistan, can we still put our hope in the United Nations system for the resolution of the Afghan crisis or other similar or dissimilar crises? It is our earnest conviction that the litmus test for United Nations survival will be its engagement, without any selectivity and in the framework of the State system, in the rigorous implementation and enforcement of its Charter.

Pakistan is blatantly breaching the United Nations Charter, which explicitly requires all Member States to refrain from the threat or use of force against the territorial integrity or political independence of any State, as well as numerous General Assembly and Security Council resolutions and other resolutions on terrorism and the use of mercenaries. The reports of the Secretary-General, his Special Envoy for Afghanistan and the United Nations Special Rapporteur on the situation of human rights in Afghanistan clearly bring to light the bellicose, obstinate and intransigent attitude of the Taliban mercenaries.

In this context, the United Nations, acting through the Security Council, has a duty to maintain international peace and security in accordance with the Charter. The Pakistani aggression, State-sponsored terrorism and other activities, which threaten the peace and security of the region and hamper regional development and cooperation, should be identified, condemned and dealt with by taking appropriate measures.

Furthermore, the Islamic State of Afghanistan earnestly expects the Security Council to consider the imposition of immediate sanctions against both the Taliban and their Pakistani mentors, in accordance with paragraph 15 of Security Council resolution 1214 (1998) of 8 December 1998 and in conformity with its responsibility under the Charter of the United Nations.

The United Nations is also expected to use its good offices to convince the Pakistani leadership, including its military intelligence wing, the Inter-Services Intelligence (ISI), to steer its policy away from intervention in Afghanistan and towards non-intervention, so that we can move from a Pakistani-dictated position of subordination to a mutually dictated position of cooperation. The Pakistani ISI should no longer thwart peace initiatives. A first step in this regard would be the withdrawal from Afghanistan of all armed Pakistanis, whether military personnel or so-called religious volunteers. Pakistan should also put a halt to its direct assistance to the Taliban, ranging from military hardware and oil to expertise and tactical advice. Only under such pressure will the Taliban resume peace negotiations.

On the verge of the next millennium, the Islamic State of Afghanistan genuinely hopes that, with the resolution of the Afghan crisis, it will be able to serve as a factor for peace and stability in the region, promoting good-neighbourliness, mutual respect and cooperation and acting as a transit country for trade between all its neighbours, without any distinction or preference.

The United Nations is earnestly expected to step up its efforts in the Afghan peace process. In this respect, we greatly appreciate the untiring efforts of the Secretary-General and Ambassador Lakhdar Brahimi, his Special Envoy for Afghanistan. The Islamic State of Afghanistan welcomes and fully supports the 19 July

Tashkent Declaration of the Member States that make up the "six plus two" group, which it hopes will be fully observed.

Regrettably, the Taliban continue to voice their adamant opposition not only to the Tashkent Declaration but to all other peace initiatives. We sincerely welcome paragraph 2 of the report of the Secretary-General (A/54/378) of 21 September 1999, which states,

> "it is noteworthy that only one week after the Tashkent meeting, the Taliban began a major offensive against the United Front in the Shomali plains, located to the north of Kabul."

Paragraph 3 further states,

> "The Taliban insist that the UF [United Front] must embrace the Emirate system while the UF question the Taliban's popular mandate to make this demand."

Mindful of the principle that there should be a peaceful resolution of the conflict, the Islamic State of Afghanistan earnestly desires a broad-based, fully representative and multi-ethnic government in Afghanistan. The Islamic State of Afghanistan, which is struggling for sovereignty and the return of peace and normalcy through the institution of such a government, earnestly aspires to the resolution of fundamental issues such as the restoration of and full respect for human rights in Afghanistan, particularly the rights of women. Under the Taliban, women have now been reduced to a voiceless and invisible state of non-being, condemned to stay in their houses and stripped of their basic rights, even the rights to work and education, all of which is against the genuine tenets of Islam.

The Islamic State of Afghanistan welcomes the fact that the first year of the new millennium will be observed as the Year of Dialogue among Civilizations, as called for by the Islamic Republic of Iran, and we believe that it will prepare suitable ground for further understanding among the global family, thereby contributing to collective human civilization.

This century introduced a new paradigm based on collective security and international organizations, concerted approaches and international order, all based on the equal sovereignty of States. From the United Nations Charter to the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, the new paradigm has affected all corners of the world. As a troubled member of this global family, Afghanistan awaits a collective endeavour by the international community to deal with its problems, thereby helping the world, or at least a part of the world, to become a better place for humankind.

The Acting President: I now give the floor to the Minister for Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Moldova, His Excellency Mr. Nicolae Tabacaru.

Mr. Tabacaru (Republic of Moldova): Let me join other delegations in congratulating Mr. Gurirab on his election as President of the General Assembly at its fifty-fourth session. His skill and experience will serve us well as he directs the vital work to be undertaken at this session. I should also like to take this opportunity to thank his predecessor, Mr. Didier Opertti, for his outstanding stewardship of the General Assembly at its fifty-third session.

The Government of the Republic of Moldova warmly welcomes the admission of the three new Members of the United Nations: the Republic of Kiribati, the Republic of Nauru, and the Kingdom of Tonga.

Since its admission to the United Nations in 1992, the Republic of Moldova has consistently been an active supporter of the world Organization. As a small country, we depend on the United Nations for our security and for our very existence. We want to see it further strengthened and the sphere of its activities expanded. We believe that in this emerging new international order, it is more necessary than ever that the United Nations be capable of fulfilling the role entrusted to it by the Charter, as the guarantor of peace, security and social justice throughout the world.

It is from that perspective that we evaluate the United Nations reform process launched by the Secretary-General; as we see it, reform means the rational adaptation of United Nations mechanisms to present and future needs. We owe the Secretary-General, Mr. Kofi Annan, our gratitude and support for his reform proposals. Especially, we welcome the implementation of the Secretary-General's reform proposals aimed at fostering greater internal coordination, streamlining procedures and rationalizing the activities of the Organization. In this context, I would like to underline the positive results thus far achieved by the United Nations Development Group and the Executive Committee on Economic and Social Affairs. The preliminary application of the United Nations Development Assistance Framework in 18 pilot countries

and more intense cooperation between Bretton Woods institutions and the United Nations are also producing promising results.

Integration within the United Nations system is also moving ahead at the country level. I can already see some encouraging results from the Republic of Moldova's "One country, one United Nations" policy. From this perspective, we believe also that the integration of United Nations representation at the country level will lead to substantive improvements and greater coherence in the relationship between the United Nations system and the host country. I take this opportunity to inform members that in the near future a United Nations common house will be officially inaugurated in the capital of our country, Chisinau.

I would like to mention in this context the substantial assistance provided by the United Nations to my country through the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) office in the Republic of Moldova. The activities carried out by the UNDP office contribute significantly to the ongoing reform process.

We believe that the diversification and deepening of collaboration among States has enhanced the development of regional and subregional cooperation as well. In fact, the Charter itself attaches great significance to regional organizations. Documents laying the foundations for collaboration between the United Nations and various regional organizations have been drawn up, in particular in recent years. General Assembly resolutions pertaining to cooperation between the United Nations on the one hand, and the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE), the League of Arab States and the Organization of African Unity (OAU) on the other, are relevant from that point of view. Some regional organizations have acquired new areas of competence, including in the field of peace and security, and have become a trustworthy support for the United Nations in containing and eliminating local conflicts. For the near future, we may expect that additional regional organizations and groupings will be interested in setting up a cooperation framework with the United Nations, similar those that exist with other regional organizations. The Republic of Moldova supports that trend.

As a founding member of the Black Sea Economic Cooperation Organization, and as the country which at the end of this month will assume the presidency of that organization, the Republic of Moldova welcomes the recent decision of the General Committee to include in the agenda of the fifty-fourth session an item concerning the granting of observer status in the General Assembly to the Black Sea Economic Cooperation Organization. To this effect, the Republic of Moldova would very much appreciate it if Member States lent their valuable support to the granting of observer status in the Assembly to that organization.

We are fully aware of the fact that because of its outstanding role in dealing with world problems, the United Nations is confronted with a growing number of new threats to international security and stability. In this context, peacekeeping operations represent one of the world Organization's main instruments with which to stop conflicts in various parts of the world and to create favourable conditions for their political settlement. It is also obvious that in recent years the United Nations has nearly exhausted its ability to respond to the increasing number of requests for such operations. Under these circumstances, we support and encourage the trend towards involving regional organizations and arrangements, in cooperation with the United Nations, in the mitigation of certain conflicts. At the same time, we consider that peacekeeping operations should as a rule be undertaken under the auspices of the United Nations and in conformity with United Nations standards.

Statements made during the general debate have offered an eloquent perspective on the major challenges confronting the present-day system of international relations and on the role that international organizations, and primarily the United Nations, have to play in order to meet them. One of the most important issues spoken of in this context is the maintenance of peace, security and stability in various regions affected by crisis and internal conflict. Unfortunately, developments in those regions compel us to acknowledge the insoluble character of many such conflicts. These so-called frozen conflicts have a huge potential for destabilization and destruction. The Kosovo tragedy has clearly shown how they can degenerate if we do not succeed in working out timely long-lasting solutions. The Secretary-General is absolutely right when he stresses that a tragic irony of many of the crises that continue to go unnoticed and unchallenged today is that they could be dealt with by far less perilous acts of intervention than the one we witnessed recently in Yugoslavia.

At the same time, one of the main conclusions to be drawn from conflicts such as those in Kosovo and in Bosnia is that no single organization or State is capable

of solving conflicts of such complexity and scale on its own.

The uniqueness of the United Nations is defined particularly by its capacity to efficiently mobilize the resources of the international community and to orchestrate its efforts in order to defuse and solve crisis and conflict situations. That unique potential has to be more actively and more efficiently used, particularly in relation to the internal conflicts confronted by some newly independent States. Since 1992, when the majority of the ex-Soviet republics became members of the United Nations, dozens of interventions concerning conflicts in these States, Moldova among them, have been spoken of in this Assembly. One of the main conclusions of those statements was that without more active involvement by the international community those conflicts will remain "frozen".

In this context, it bears mention that the United Nations, as well as other international bodies and individual States, have made an important contribution to ending the violence and military clashes and in bringing the parties involved to the negotiating table. Another positive result from the actions of the international community has been the parties' acceptance of the idea of resolving their differences through peaceful means.

For this reason, the Republic of Moldova, like other countries with similar problems in our own region, has continued to support more active involvement by the United Nations and regional organizations in managing the conflicts which they have faced for many years now. We think that the time is ripe to give more consideration to the question of how the root causes of those conflicts should be identified and dealt with. In this respect the United Nations can efficiently use its potential only through intensive cooperation and interaction with the European organizations and institutions, particularly OSCE. Through enhanced synergy and avoidance of duplication, and by using and maintaining consulting mechanisms at various levels and exchanging information about plans and activities between itself and those organizations, the United Nations can improve the situation in countries affected by internal conflicts.

However, there must be firm decisions about what action must be taken to ensure the implementation of the relevant resolutions and decisions adopted of the United Nations and the OSCE, the main international organizations involved in settling those conflicts. We believe that the General Assembly should evaluate the efficiency and effectiveness of cooperation between the United Nations and OSCE from this point of view also.

That I refer to the issue of conflicts in some detail is not incidental. The problem of the eastern region of the Republic of Moldova has been repeatedly described, from this rostrum, by representatives of my country. To my regret, I must inform of the Assembly that there has been no tangible progress towards a comprehensive settlement. Throughout the negotiations, we have sought to accomplish the purpose for which the Assembly was established: to replace mistrust and violent confrontation with dialogue and agreement between the parties to the conflict.

The Government of my country has shown more than once that it strongly advocates a peaceful resolution, through negotiations, of the conflict situation in Transnistria, in accordance with the norms and practice of international law and in collaboration with international organizations, primarily OSCE, and with the Russian Federation and Ukraine as mediators. Although it has made the spirit of compromise evident, the Government firmly believes that any proposal for a settlement must provide for territorial integrity to be maintained and for control over the territory of the whole country to be ensured.

Despite a reasonable compromise on the part of the constitutional authorities, separatist tendencies still persist. A number of documents — elaborated with the active participation of OSCE and other mediators and signed by all parties involved — are being interpreted unilaterally, and in a manner contrary to their meaning, by the Transnistrian leaders. Moreover, these leaders are trying to impose certain concepts that do not exist in law and territorial practice and are contrary to the principle of territorial integrity. Here I refer to am referring to the concept of "common State," which has very frequently been imposed in discussions to define relations between the central and local authorities in certain conflict zones. We consider this concept dangerous due as it attempts to distort the notion of statehood and State sovereignty and provide a legal framework for the ideology of aggressive separatism. I believe that the United Nations and other international organizations will also find this concept both inadequate and counter-productive as a means of resolving internal conflicts.

In Transnistria, we are striving for a rapid and definitive solution and a return to stability, and a return also to respect for human rights, which continue to be

violated in this region. The case of the Ilascu group, and violation of fundamental human rights and freedoms it represents are eloquent in this respect.

We consider it imperative for international efforts to solve the current crisis situations, most of which have separatism as their main cause, to be strengthened. In this connection, I would mention that we fully share the views expressed earlier by the Minister for Foreign Affairs of the Russian Federation concerning aggressive separatism. Indeed, the international community and, first of all, the United Nations should decisively suppress any manifestations of separatism and rigorously and consistently defend the principles of sovereignty, integrity and the inviolability of national frontiers. To this end, the complete eradication of outside encouragement and support for separatist forces is most certainly necessary.

Another aspect of the Transnistrian problem is military: this zone is famously overmilitarized, which has very negatively affected the settlement process. Thousands of tons of shells and armaments — both accounted for and unaccounted for, and including equipment limited by the Conventional Armed Forces in Europe (CFE) Treaty — are stationed there. This military presence is in evident contradiction to the Constitution of the Republic of Moldova, which declared the State's neutrality and that foreign troops are not admissible in our country.

Another premise for accelerating the settlement process is, would undoubtedly be the immediate, complete, unconditional and orderly withdrawal of foreign troops, as stipulated in OSCE summit decisions required by the CFE Treaty, the keystone of European security and may on no account be violated.

I hope that, together with our partners and the relevant international organizations, we can establish, very soon, an effective mechanism and detailed schedule for the takeover, destruction or removal of the foreign military arsenal from Republic of Moldova territory. I express my gratitude for the political support and, especially, for the financial assistance provided by many United Nations Member States for the withdrawal or elimination of those arsenals.

I voice our hope that the proceedings of the General Assembly at its fifty-fourth session will be conducted in a spirit of solidarity and with a realistic and constructive approach to the complex issues confronting the contemporary world at the end of this millennium. The delegation of the Republic of Moldova is committed to contributing, alongside other Member States, to the fulfilment of the lofty goals of the United Nations.

The Acting President: I next call on the Minister for Foreign Affairs of the Comoros, His Excellency Mr. Souef Mohamed El-Amine.

Mr. El-Amine (Comoros) *(spoke in French)*: It is an honour and a pleasure for me to take the floor once again before this Assembly. At the outset I would like to congratulate the President on his brilliant election to lead our work at this session. His election is an unparalleled tribute to all of Africa and particularly to his fraternal country, Namibia, which today sees one of its sons presiding over the destinies of this fifty-fourth session of the General Assembly. We are confident that his qualities as an eminent diplomat and his great experience guarantee the success of our work.

I would also like to take this opportunity to pay glowing tribute to his predecessor, His Excellency Mr. Didier Opertti, for the devotion and the ability with which he conducted the previous session.

At the same time, allow me to express appreciation for the full value of the efforts deployed by our Secretary-General, His Excellency Mr. Kofi Annan, in the service of our Organization. The evidence he gives of an untiring will and of constant dedication to the human cause, especially in the field of peace, deserve saluting, and I would like to express all of our gratitude to him.

At the same time, I would like to wholeheartedly welcome the delegations of the Republics of Kiribati and Nauru and of the Kingdom of Tonga, and to express to all of them our congratulations on their having been admitted to the great family of the United Nations.

The time has come to assess the century that is coming to a close and to see together how we are going to face the challenges of the next millennium — a millennium that we hope will be one of peace and prosperity, bringing hope to our peoples and our countries. This is the wish of the Comorien people for all the nations of the world. But how can we realize this wish?

Our Organization offers the best framework for facing the challenges of the third millennium, but it will need to be supported by a more active commitment on our part, a greater willingness to face problems and a real will to deal with them — without excessive fervour

or uncertainty — and to resolve them rationally. With such will we can achieve the objectives of the founders of our Organization in the field of peace, justice and progress.

Achieving a disarmed world, which will at the same time guarantee peace, social justice and progress, is the fundamental purpose of our Organization. In addition, we all hoped that the 1990s would be the decade of peace and solidarity among nations, because certain positive aspects led us to expect this. The various day-to-day realities we have experienced unfortunately are reviving our fears that the next millennium will begin in uncertainty about the future of humanity.

In fact, the wars that are tearing our continents apart, the grave violations of human rights, the extreme poverty to which many peoples have been reduced and which reveals the enormous disparities between the social strata, and the recent tragedies such as that in Kosovo make us fear the worst and require us to be more vigilant. Our Organization, the efforts of which we salute, must persevere in the search for solutions for eliminating the major and various problems besetting the world today.

Human rights has always been an essential concern of our Organization. Thus, how can we not deplore that, at the threshold of the next millennium, humanity is still witnessing flagrant violations of fundamental rights. It is because of this major concern that I would like to salute here the efforts to establish an international criminal court, which, I am certain, will contribute to greater justice. We hope that this court, once it becomes operational, will enjoy all the necessary independence to carry out its functions fully and effectively and to apply the fundamental principles of humanitarian law.

With regard to economic issues, we must agree that economic recovery is not yet in sight for many countries, especially those suffering from armed conflicts. Certainly many agreements emerging from international meetings have highlighted the special attention that must be paid to the problems of developing countries. But we must insist further on this and demand that genuine solidarity with these countries be shown. Through such solidarity positive action could be mobilized.

With regard to Africa, in general it continues to be marked by several things. First, its external debt has become a major obstacle to development, especially because financial flows are often used for debt servicing rather than for promoting the expansion of the economy and sustainable development. Also, the level of debt has discouraged domestic and foreign investment. Secondly, the continent is heavily scarred by wars which have sharply checked development. Thirdly, global trade practices have reduced the commercial prospects of the continent. Fourthly, the continent is to some extent excluded from the global information revolution. In Africa the basic education system is generally the most limited, the effects of poverty are extreme, and the health system needs reforming.

To create the necessary conditions to solve these different problems which are hampering the development of our African countries, national, regional and international initiatives must be undertaken, encouraged and supported by the international community. A genuine partnership among African countries must be the basis for solid and effective cooperation that allows these countries to share their experiences and promotes the rapid integration of regional economies.

In the context of this need for South-South cooperation, my country welcomed most favourably the holding of the special summit in Sirte, which revealed once again the solidarity of African States and their support for Libya, a brother country. We believe that the conditions are now in place for the total and final lifting of the embargo imposed on that country. The summit also put in place new rules to improve the structures of the Organization of African Unity, with a view to an effective union of its countries through the strengthening of security and cooperation arrangements. In this regard the Sirte summit continues to serve as a point of reference, and we hope its objectives will be achieved.

I also take this opportunity to express our thanks to the Government of Libya for the generosity it showed to certain African countries, allowing them to honour their commitments to the pan-African organization.

Moreover, the international community, especially the international financial institutions, must support these national and regional efforts by facilitating their access to markets and investments, reducing debt constraints and allowing developing countries to benefit from new trade agreements.

Like all developing countries, the Islamic Federal Republic of the Comoros also faces enormous difficulties. The regrettable events that have unfolded there since March 1997 have further weakened an economy that was already in decline and beset by considerable deficits in public finance; a chronic deficit in the balance of

payments; a large foreign debt; and strong competition for export resources by synthetic products.

This situation is of great concern to the Government which I have the honour to represent. It is firmly engaged in a process of development through the establishment of solid bases for the rule of law and the adoption of a policy of rehabilitation and economic and political recovery through the strict management of public finances and the promotion of morality in administrative practices and political customs. This rehabilitation policy should allow the State to fulfil its priority domestic commitments domestically and to honour its commitments to its foreign partners.

In addition, other objectives to complement this good governance policy are being considered by the current Government. They include respect for human rights; the improvement of social policies and hence of the efficacy of health and education services for all; the protection of children and women; the implementation of the Convention on the Rights of the Child; the advancement and mainstreaming of women; guaranteed autonomy for the judiciary; freedom of the press; and so on.

To encourage private investment and promote the introduction of new technology and foreign capital, opportunities have been opened to domestic and foreign investors by suppressing constraints on approvals of foreign investments.

Furthermore, aware of the enormous contribution South-South cooperation makes to development by offering the opportunity to exploit the economic prosperity of other regions, the Islamic Federal Republic of the Comoros must respond to the two-fold necessity of participating fully in the globalization process and of steadfastly prospering in its own regional and subregional environment. That is why it is striving further to consolidate its participation in the Indian Ocean Commission and planning to join other groups of the region. These endeavours, undertaken since the accession to power of the current Government, may well be insufficient, but they constitute a serious and essential foundation, and a guarantee of in-depth reform.

The President returned to the Chair.

After this general summary, I would be remiss if I failed to report the prevailing political situation in the Comoros. My country is experiencing a secessionist crisis in the sister island of Anjouan, which has shaken the very foundations of the Republic and threatened its unity, territorial integrity and, above all, the peace and tolerance that have always characterized relations among the inhabitants of our four islands.

My country's Government cannot endorse secession or independence, which could dislocate the Comoros, whose unity and social coherence are the only guarantees for the evolution of harmonious social and economic development. Three inter-island conferences have been held under the auspices of the OAU and the League of Arab States with a view to rapidly settling this crisis. The most recent, held in Antananarivo, Madagascar, in April, resulted in an agreement to establish a new institutional framework to meet the aspirations of the Comorians, guarantee unity and territorial integrity, and give each island greater autonomy. In this respect, I have the pleasant duty once again to convey our sincere thanks to the Malagasy authorities, not only for having held that important meeting on the sisterly large island, but also for having established conditions conducive to our debate.

At the conference, the lack of cooperation and the intransigence of the representatives of the island of Anjouan — who postponed the signing of the final document — provoked extremist groups among the population of Grande-Comore, where anti-Anjouan riots broke out. The threat of civil war, of hateful "insular cleansing" and the violent and forcible separation of families led the National Development Army, in the face of the inertia of the political authorities, to act to avoid the worse by assuming control of the country. A transition Government was immediately formed to restore and guarantee civil peace and to create new republican and democratic institutions to ensure greater autonomy for the islands, in compliance with the Antananarivo agreement. Thus, the consolidation of the Antananarivo agreement remains a Government priority and we are doing everything possible to establish the conditions essential to the implementation of the agreement.

In the context of the settlement of the crisis, a frank, direct and constructive dialogue has been established for the first time between the central authorities and the Anjouan separatists. In this respect, a joint communiqué signed on the Comorian island of Mohéli in July by the leaders of the two parties to the summit. I wish to stress that Comorians view this act as a step towards the settlement of the crisis. In his meetings with Comorians, the Head of State, Mr. Azali Assoumani, is seeking the necessary breakthrough to achieve an honourable peace to the benefit of all that unites us.

We hope that the ratification of this agreement by our Anjouan brethren will not be long in coming so that the process may continue in the interests of the united Comorian people. The Comorian Government has begun in-depth reflection in order to draft the fundamental texts to govern the future union of the Comoros. The next step is very crucial in order to implement the published electoral timetable, which anticipates, *inter alia*, a popular referendum on the constitution and mayoral, legislative and presidential elections.

The Comorian Government welcomed the relevant resolutions adopted by the OAU at its thirty-fifth Summit in Algiers; the Ministers for Foreign Affairs of the Organization of the Islamic Conference at their most recent Conference in Ouagadougou; the Ministers for Foreign Affairs of the League of Arab States at their 112th session in Cairo (A/50/864/Annex II, res. 1) and the Permanent Council of French-speaking Countries, meeting in Paris, in the framework of the speedy establishment of constitutional order and of the settlement of the separatist crisis. To that end, we invite all people of good will and friendly, brotherly and neighbour countries, as well as organizations, to come see with their own eyes the process that has been launched and to contribute to the consolidation of democracy and the rule of law in the Comoros.

Nevertheless, we remain concerned by the fact that holding elections in Anjouan would be tantamount to recognizing secession or ratifying independence. Indeed, such a formula is contrary to the principle of unity of the country, the spirit of the Antananarivo agreement and the very principles of the OAU, the sponsor of the agreement. In this regard, we invite the OAU and the entire international community to join us in the consideration necessary to overcome this dilemma.

In this vein, I should also like to take this opportunity to express the sympathy and profound gratitude of the people and the Government of the Comoros to the countries of the region, especially South Africa and Madagascar; friendly countries such as France and Egypt; and institutions such as the OAU, the League of Arab States, the International Organization of La Francophonie and the European Union, which have never ceased attaching their special interest to this problem. I should like to tell them once again that the people of the Comoros hopes to be able to rely on them, again and always, to find a speedy solution to this crisis.

The Anjouan crisis, in the view of Comorians, is all the more threatening to unity, peace and love among them as it is added to a painful 24-year-old problem, that of the Comorian island of Mayotte. The Assembly will understand the helplessness of a people threatened with dispersion, following the amputation of part of the territory of its country, Mayotte, and witnessing an attempt by a sister island to leave the Comorian union. This crisis has revived the pain of the Comoros people caused by the problem of Mayotte, which still shows no signs of being resolved. Our Organization, which is regularly seized of this question, has always recognized that Mayotte belongs to the Comoros and has adopted resolutions in favour of the integration of the island into its natural family.

The Comorian Government, faithful to the fundamental principles of the Charter of our Organization, continues to give priority to dialogue to resolve this problem. It is with deep respect for these principles that it appeals to France, a country with which the Comoros has for long had close ties of friendship and cooperation, to consider opening a direct, constructive dialogue to find a rapid, negotiated solution to this unfortunate dispute.

My country is very concerned about the situation in the Middle East. It hopes that the new Israeli Administration will commit itself more to the peace process begun on 4 September at Sharm el-Sheikh, Egypt, for a lasting, fair and harmonious resolution of the Israel-Palestine crisis. We also hope that the other problems, regarding Syria and Lebanon, will soon be settled.

The question of Jammu and Kashmir continues to be of concern to us. We appeal to India and Pakistan to show restraint in order to prevent any escalation in the region.

My country welcomes the diplomatic initiatives of the United Nations which made it possible for peace to be restored to Kosovo and East Timor.

We also welcome the Lomé Peace Agreement of 7 July 1999, with regard to the Sierra Leone conflict; the Abuja Agreement and its additional protocols regarding the conflict in Guinea-Bissau; and the Lusaka ceasefire agreement, signed on 10 July 1999 by the parties to the conflict in the Democratic Republic of the Congo.

Having noted these hopes reasons for hope, we cannot forget the situation in Angola and Somalia and the situation prevailing between Ethiopia and Eritrea, where

there are no signs of a solution. The efforts made by the OAU should be supported by our Organization in order to achieve peace and reconciliation in these fraternal countries.

The ideals of peace, security and development are the responsibility of the international community, which must work to make them a reality. Each of us must contribute to ensure these values and to build a more human, peaceful and just world which is a harbinger of hope for future generations.

The President: I call on the Minister for External Relations of Camaroon, His Excellency Mr. Augustin Kontchou Kouomegni.

Mr. Kontchou Kouomegni (Cameroon) (*spoke in French*): We are pleased to note that the annual sessions of the General Assembly are increasingly each year not only a special forum for discussing international affairs, but also and in particular an opportunity for the democratic expression of our shared experience, a time for each Member State of the Organization to freely state his or her views.

In this context, Cameroon is particularly pleased that the presidency of the General Assembly at its fifty-fourth session has been assumed by a fraternal country, Namibia. We regard it as highly symbolic that this role, at this delicate time of a bridge between two centuries and two millenniums, has been entrusted to you, Mr. Theo-Ben Gurirab, worthy representative of Namibia, the last State in Africa to recover its sovereignty. My country fully associates itself with the praise addressed to you and we assure you of our full support as you exercise your difficult and lofty duties. I hardly need recall that your country's attainment of independence, just like the end of apartheid in South Africa, demonstrates what the United Nations and the international community are capable of.

Cameroon wishes also to reiterate its full appreciation to your predecessor, Mr. Didier Opertti, for the skill, devotion, effectiveness and open-mindedness he demonstrated throughout the fifty-third session.

Finally, we wish to pay tribute to the Secretary-General, Mr. Kofi Annan, for his continuing work to consolidate peace and combat poverty, and for his special attention to the problems of the African continent and the poorest regions or those in crisis. His outstanding report on the work of the Organization illustrates again this year the intelligence and determination that are his constant guides as he performs his duties. The work of the Secretary-General, carried out with an acute sense of the common interest of all Member States, deserves our support.

Cameroon welcomes the new Members of the Organization: Kiribati, Nauru and Tonga. Their admission reinforces the universality of our Organization.

Despite great progress in many areas, this last decade of the twentieth century has been marked, and continues to be marked, by less positive events in the world. More than ever before, therefore, we need to react, act and even act preventively, constantly and vigorously, in order to rectify an inappropriate course of events. There are still too many conflicts. Too much human blood has been shed. Too many men and women have their fundamental rights and freedoms flouted. There is too much poverty, even destitution, which is in stark contrast to an unparalleled opulence. Too many inequalities and too much interference and domination persist in inter-State relations.

This succession of dangers is accentuated by the problems of epidemics and illiteracy, and recalls the vital need for greater solidarity between prosperous countries and developing countries, given the growing globalization of economies and the universal need for peace, democracy, prosperity, justice, the guarantee of fundamental human rights and the effective sovereignty of States.

Cameroon therefore welcomes recent positive steps on the path to peace. I refer to the Middle East, with the signing of the Israeli-Palestinian agreement in Egypt. The resolution of the Kosovo crisis, and particularly the establishment of an administration guaranteed by our Organization, also deserves recognition. Cameroon encourages all actors in the Balkans and the Middle East to continue to advance resolutely towards lasting normalization.

We are also very mindful of developments in East Timor, and we hope very much that wisdom will prevail — that is, that everyone will respect the process initiated under United Nations auspices.

We welcome the holding in Maputo, Mozambique, of the First Meeting of the States Parties to the Ottawa Convention on the Prohibition of the Use, Stockpiling, Production and Transfer of Anti-personnel Mines and on Their Destruction. That meeting made it possible to continue the campaign to heighten the international

community's awareness of the need to ban these ghastly weapons for ever. These weapons continue, particularly in Africa, to indiscriminately mutilate children, women, the elderly, civilians and military personnel every day. Cameroon, in confirmation of its commitment to this great struggle, recently ratified the Convention.

We welcome the results achieved in Sierra Leone, Guinea-Bissau and Northern Ireland. These and other advances cannot, however, make us forget either the deadly conflicts that continue to destroy lives or the threats of holocaust that persist because of the lack of significant progress in the field of nuclear disarmament. In this overall context, which remains full of elements, the proliferation of hotbeds of tension and conflict in Africa, particularly in Central Africa, is a major source of concern for Cameroon. That particular situation deserves more attention from the international community than ever before. Unfortunately, as the Secretary-General notes in his report, these African crises, no matter how grave, have basically been ignored.

Is it conceivable that Somalia, fragmented and disorganized, with its helpless, starving, sick people, and now bereft of any viable state structure, could be purely and simply forgotten, abandoned and allowed to perish? Could the situation in Somalia today not be the fate of other countries on our continent and elsewhere? Should the international community abdicate its duty of solidarity with and assistance to Western Sahara, to the Sudan or in the conflict between Ethiopia and Eritrea?

We deplore the continuing bloody destructive crisis in Angola. That disastrous civil war directly or indirectly destroys thousands of lives and systematically obliterates infrastructure every day; this, too, seems to have been forgotten by everyone. Since the withdrawal of the United Nations Observer Mission in Angola (MONUA), the States members of the United Nations Standing Advisory Committee on Security Questions in Central Africa, which for a year now has been chaired by Cameroon, is trying to do the impossible in order to prevent Angola from permanently locking itself up behind fratricidal closed doors in the face of this kind of widespread indifference.

Together with some other regional and international diplomatic actors, the Standing Advisory Committee has also made many efforts to try to restore peace in Burundi, the Republic of the Congo, the Democratic Republic of the Congo and Rwanda, particularly through the resolute dissemination of a culture of peace.

In this respect, Cameroon and all States Members of the Committee welcome the peace accords on the Democratic Republic of the Congo signed in July in Lusaka, Zambia. This came as a result of the doggedness and tenacity of African mediators, and it proves, if any proof is needed, that Africa, with the support of the international community, is able to overcome its difficulties.

We wish to reiterate the solemn appeal of the Standing Advisory Committee to all signatories of these accords to see to it that the peace process is carried through. Cameroon is convinced that their determination to consolidate peace will be supported by the international community, in particular through the speedy and effective establishment of the peacekeeping force that the United Nations is planning to deploy in the Democratic Republic of the Congo.

No matter what the cost, we must eradicate wars and conflicts in Africa, particularly in Central Africa. We must halt the spiral of bloody confrontation and fighting in that subregion, which pits ethnic group blindly against ethnic group, political group against political group. It is not true that love of and devotion to one's own people or faith in one's own ideals must be proved by one's hatred towards others. These grim tragedies, as we know, are not inevitable. Fundamentally, they are the result of practices to which Africa must put an end; otherwise, the continent will be for ever left out of humankind's majestic march towards modernity.

The diagnosis of the causes of this situation is already apparent: poverty, destitution, ignorance, the absence of good governance, the fragility of the nations and States concerned, and acts of interference of all kinds are at the heart of the problem. Together we can combat them and overcome them.

This is why one of the priorities of Cameroon's diplomacy, promoted by President Paul Biya, with the full endorsement of his peers, is to help guarantee peace, security, stability, democracy and prosperity for the 100 million women and men of Central Africa. This determination has guided our action as we head the United Nations Standing Advisory Committee on Security Questions in Central Africa.

As we prepare to hand over the chairmanship to another fraternal country, we would like to recall the progress that member States have made together over the last 11 months in our quest to strengthen peace, security

and stability in Central Africa. The most significant initiative undoubtedly was the threefold decision taken at the meetings in Yaoundé, on 25 February 1999, and in Malabo, on 24 June 1999, by 9 of the 11 heads of State of Central Africa, to establish the Council for Peace and Security in Central Africa (COPAX); to adopt the Yaoundé declaration on peace, security and stability in central Africa; and to integrate COPAX into the structures of the Economic Community of Central African States (ECCAS). Through this threefold decision, those heads of State have given our subregion a politico-diplomatic organ and ethical framework, as well as a code of conduct to meet the challenges of prevention, management and the lasting settlement of crises and conflicts. The practical modalities for the functioning of COPAX are now being worked out in the secretariat of ECCAS.

Since crisis and conflict prevention remain absolute priorities, the States of Central Africa have continued their efforts to establish an early warning mechanism. This structure has just acquired premises that serve as its headquarters in Libreville, Gabon.

A number of other initiatives mark important progress for the establishment of peace and stability in Central Africa.

I refer first to the decision taken in June at the Malabo summit by the heads of State of Central Africa to lend their prestige to the establishment of a subregional centre for the promotion of human rights and democracy. With the support of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights, this centre will be both an observatory of realities and trends and a kind of think tank to produce recommendations on human rights and democracy. I wish, on behalf of the peoples of Central Africa, to welcome the encouragement shown by Mrs. Mary Robinson for this project, as well as the steps she has taken to follow up on the resolution adopted on this subject by the General Assembly at its fifty-third session.

I also wish to refer to the establishment of a network of parliamentarians of Central Africa — an initiative that should lead to the establishment of a subregional parliament which will be both a democratic forum and a subregional platform for cooperation and harmonization of laws dealing with questions of peace, security and integration.

I would also mention the establishment of the Central African Court of Justice, the seat of which will be in N'Djamena.

I would like to refer to the high-level seminar held in Yaoundé from 19 to 21 July this year on the report of the Secretary-General on the causes of conflict and the promotion of durable peace and sustainable development in Africa, proceeding from the desire and determination of the leaders of Central Africa to build peace and progress in the subregion. This high-profile meeting — which brought together parliamentarians, seasoned experts, civilians and military, men and women with experience representing civil society and non-governmental organizations and whose report was published by the United Nations — made it possible to identify ways and means for the specific implementation in Central Africa of the recommendations of the Secretary-General.

The main actions recommended by the seminar to follow up the very frank diagnosis of the situation seek to promote effectively human rights, participative democracy, methods for the peaceful settlement of disputes, good governance, transparency, international humanitarian law and accelerated national and regional integration.

The proliferation and illicit circulation of small arms and light weapons in the region is another major concern for the member countries of the Committee because they threaten their stability. A subregional conference will be held on this subject at the end of October in N'Djamena under the aegis of the Committee and with United Nations support. It will make it possible for member States to assess the scale, causes, mechanisms and consequences of this phenomenon and to envisage specific steps to be taken.

All of these actions — in particular the establishment of COPAX, the early warning mechanism, the subregional human rights centre, the parliament and the Central African Court of Justice — are challenges, not merely for Central Africa itself, but clearly for the entire international community. They will be priority areas for fruitful bilateral and multilateral cooperation at the threshold of the new millennium. That is certainly the wish of the peoples of Central Africa.

The design of a subregional policy for peace, stability, democracy and development in Central Africa is partly related to the domestic policy of Cameroon. The head of State has always believed that there is no crisis that cannot be resolved peacefully through dialogue, pooling of efforts and especially through respect for the law. It is this conviction that prompted Cameroon to

stress the search for a settlement through legal means of the dispute with the Federal Republic of Nigeria regarding the land and maritime border.

In this year which marks the closing of the United Nations Decade of International Law, we must forcefully reaffirm our total support for the rule of law in inter-State relations and the peaceful settlement of disputes, including through jurisdictional means when other mechanisms have proved to be ineffectual. That is why we urge the international community to continue to help our two countries, Cameroon and Nigeria, to adopt effective measures to strengthen peace and the climate of confidence which has emerged following the contacts at the highest level which have taken place this year.

Pending the verdict of the International Court of Justice in The Hague, three of these measures could be taken right now: a solemn declaration of commitment to abide by the Court's decision, withdrawal of armed forces from the battlefield to positions which they held before the outbreak of fighting, and the lifting by Nigeria of its recent reservations about the optional clause regarding binding jurisdiction of the International Court of Justice, reservations which negate an international society based on law. The positive winds of change now blowing across Nigeria, following the coming to power of the democratically elected civilian regime, give us enormous hope.

Through the work it did last year, Cameroon, like other States in Central Africa, is resolutely committed to saving succeeding generations from the scourge of war. But we did more than that. We also determined for the sake of future generations to protect the environment and to safeguard the natural resources. An example of this was the summit on conservation and sustainable forest development organized last March in Yaoundé in the presence of heads of State and Government of the subregion and a distinguished host, His Royal Highness Prince Philip, the Duke of Edinburgh of the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland, who is past President of the World Wide Fund for Nature.

Four resolutions were adopted by the heads of State and Government of Central Africa to preserve and extend the millions of hectares of forest in our subregion. They undertook to conserve and manage the forests of Central Africa in a sustainable manner to safeguard our rich biodiversity. They then undertook, in particular, to protect new transnational forest zones in the Congo basin. Then the major partners and donors agreed to provide financial and technical assistance to implement the resolutions and commitments adopted at the Yaoundé summit. Finally, the summit participants agreed that good forest management is an important part of work for sustainable development in Central Africa.

However, in the areas of the protection, conservation and sustainable management of forests and biodiversity, a profound dilemma has arisen. Central Africa is, after the Amazon region of South America, the second largest forested area of the world whose natural characteristics are decisive for the balance of the biosphere and the ecosystems of the entire planet. The accelerated and mindless destruction of this forest would in fact be a direct way to prepare for the disappearance of all life on earth. In a word, the forests of Central Africa are the lungs of the world.

Following the Yaoundé summit, the senior officials of Central Africa and the peoples concerned became clearly aware of their duty to all humankind, a duty that should be reflected in the sound conservation and management of forests and the diverse resources they contain. But at the same time, the experts rightly noted that this would involve extremely heavy and increasingly higher costs. The costs of protecting species, reforestation and reintroducing animals, as well as the administrative costs involved in the functioning of the institutions needed to do those jobs, will be an additional burden on the already meagre resources of the countries of our subregion.

This is why we believe that it would only be right for the whole of humankind — for which we are making this vital sacrifice of forest and biodiversity conservation — to find the ways and means to support us in this work for the common good. This could be done by providing matching funds or, better yet, by bringing about genuine global action under the guidance of the United Nations and financed by a fund for the preservation and sustainable management of forests and biodiversity in Central Africa. That fund would support all the important preliminary work to be done in this essential area of globalization.

We will be submitting a draft resolution on this subject for the kind consideration of the General Assembly.

When Cameroon campaigns with other States for the protection of the environment and for the safeguarding of natural resources, we do so very mindful of the long

term, which has meaning only in relation to the future of mankind, and of younger generations in particular. We are all the more conscious of the importance of the legacy we will leave for the adults of tomorrow because more than 46 per cent of the population of Cameroon will reach adulthood at the beginning of the twenty-first century. The proportion of our children who are today under 15 years of age, like all men and women of the world in the next century, have a legitimate right to demand of us, as the most important part of our legacy, peace, security and stability in freedom and development and in a healthy environment. That is why, in conclusion, I wish to address our partners in the prosperous countries, particularly the Group of Eight.

I wish first of all to say how much we appreciate the steps that have been taken this year to reduce the debt burden of the poorest countries, particularly those in our continent. According to the Secretary-General, the African debt burden represents more than 300 per cent of the value of goods and services exported from the region. Therefore, the spirit of solidarity in the Group of Eight, which is a good sign, must be pursued and consolidated while taking into account the situation of the so-called medium-income countries. That spirit of solidarity must be resolutely continued and take root in all other developed countries.

The Secretary-General's in-depth coverage of many subjects in his report calls for us to reflect on them. I will take up just one of these subjects: AIDS.

Like other pandemics, AIDS not only jeopardizes the future of millions of African men and women, it is also a mortal danger for all humankind. To show a lack of concern for its ravages in Africa, no matter what part of the world one comes from, would be suicidal indifference. The future of the world is more indivisible than ever before. The choice can no longer be postponed — the choice between the universal common good and the chaos caused by poverty, destitution, ignorance, injustice, the absence of good governance, interference, wars, et cetera.

The end of this century shows every sign of serving as a loud and clear call to the whole of mankind, but first and foremost to the leaders of nations. The end of the century has made hope possible and has brought about the global advancement of the values of peace, democracy, solidarity and the struggle for human rights. These principles must not merely guide each nation; we believe that they should also inspire the relations between nations. The staunch resolve of all countries to promote these principles together is the only guarantee of a better future for humanity. In order to bring this about, mankind as a whole — increasingly more united and in solidarity under the banner of the United Nations — has a duty to provide speedy assistance wherever the life and dignity of the human being have been seriously undermined or threatened.

Accordingly, it is clear that the international community, assembled within the United Nations, has an inalienable, inviolate and sacred right to act. This universal right to act, whose letter, spirit, legality and legitimacy come from the Charter itself, is the reflection and the inevitable consequence of the changes occurring in the world today. Clearly, it excludes any form of interference.

A new world has thus been born; we must acknowledge this from now on. The Millennium Assembly and the Millennium Summit, to be held in the year 2000, should embody the spirit of that new world and set it in order.

The President: I now give the floor to the Minister for External Relations and Cooperation of Burundi, His Excellency Mr. Severin Ntahomvukiye.

Mr. Ntahomvukiye (Burundi) (*spoke in French*): Allow me first of all to associate myself with previous speakers in expressing to you, Sir, and to the members of the Bureau, my delegation's warm congratulations on your election to lead us in the General Assembly at this session. You can count on our total support for the accomplishment of your difficult task.

I would also like to express my appreciation to your predecessor, Mr. Didier Opertti, for the skill and competence he exhibited during his mandate.

I would also like to take this opportunity to congratulate the Republic of Kiribati, the Republic of Nauru and the Kingdom of Tonga on having joined the great family of the United Nations.

Finally, allow me to pay tribute to the work of Mr. Kofi Annan, the Secretary-General of our Organization, for his ceaseless efforts in favour of international peace and security. My country, Burundi, fully appreciates his valuable contribution to the search for a negotiated political solution to the crisis it has suffered since October 1993.

As the work of the current session of the General Assembly is taking place, my country is striving to turn a new page in its history. Burundis have decidedly chosen dialogue and negotiation to put an end to the armed conflict that has lasted for almost six years. The Arusha peace talks that began in June 1998 under the aegis of the former President of the sisterly country of Tanzania, Mwalimu Julius Nyerere, are being actively pursued and are now at a crucial stage.

The sixth round of the Arusha peace talks, which ended a few days ago, was preceded by fruitful consultations held in Dar-Es-Salaam among the six principal negotiators aimed at reaching a compromise based on the drafts submitted by the negotiating parties or groups of parties. These consultations, which represent the keystone of the peace process, should resume on 4 October. We hope that this time they will have tangible results that could serve as a basis for the final Arusha agreement.

Let me briefly recall the specific context in which the Arusha process was initiated in June 1998: five years of relentless fratricidal war between the rebels and the Government, in which the principal victims had been, as they continue to be, hundreds of thousands of innocent children, women and elderly people, for the most part unarmed. More than 30 years of massacres and killings have torn asunder the very fabric of society and resulted in entrenched hatred and extreme mistrust among the various ethnic and political groups. Repeated crises have resulted in massive flows of refugees and a major diaspora. Furthermore, economic development plans have been consistently hamstrung by recurring political instability.

It was in that context that the Government objectively and deliberately decided to abandon the logic of war and to choose political dialogue in which all the people of Burundi could participate without exception, regardless of the manner — peaceful or armed — in which they previously had chosen to make their political demands. The armed groups were a particular focus of this dialogue, and it was mainly because of them that the negotiations were held outside the country.

The goal is to reach a comprehensive peace agreement and ultimately achieve full national reconciliation among the entire population of Burundi, without exception.

Several obstacles continue to stand in the way of that lofty goal, which will not be attained if timely efforts are not made to overcome those challenges.

The first obstacle is the failure of the armed rebel factions to participate in the negotiations. Differences of opinion within those movements, where the armed groups no longer recognize the authority of the political leaders who are participating in the Arusha negotiations and thus reject the outcome ahead of time, have resulted in a situation in which the validity and viability of any peace agreement reached without those parties would be in doubt.

The Government of Burundi believes that it is imperative to set aside the formalities advocated by the mediators and to invite the armed factions to participate fully in the peace process. The Government of Burundi is willing to consider any form of negotiation with them, within or outside the process.

Mediation should take place immediately, because we are working against the clock in this fragile peace process, which could be jeopardized or brought to a halt by events. If, after being invited, the armed factions or other parties to the negotiations refuse to participate in the peace process, we would agree with the mediators that Burundi, in close and steadfast cooperation with its neighbours, must isolate and neutralize the rebels or other parties that are unwilling to participate in the negotiations.

The second obstacle is the continuing violence. In other crisis situations, political dialogue for conflict settlement is preceded by a ceasefire or a suspension of hostilities. In the case of Burundi, however, that necessary condition for negotiation has been neglected since the beginning, as if it were optional. The Government draws to the attention of the subregion and of the international community the serious and continuing acts of violence committed by the rebels despite the ongoing peace negotiations. These unrestrained and cowardly acts of violence, whose main target is unarmed civilians, have no moral or political justification. No one even claims responsibility; it is pure terrorism.

If the rebels were eventually to use as a pretext the fact that they had wished to participate in the negotiations, it would have no validity because, as I have just stated, the Government is open to any initiative that might lead to the cessation of the hostilities, which have gone on for far too long. The situation is serious, and the Government of Burundi requests the international and regional communities to help it in the following ways.

First, through effective cooperation with neighbouring countries in the area of security, including with the Republic of Tanzania, with which cooperation decisions were taken at the ministerial level on two occasions, in February and August 1999; those decisions have not been implemented. There is no doubt that if those decisions were translated into joint action on the ground, both external and internal rebel activities would soon cease.

Secondly, it is necessary to disarm and neutralize those Burundi rebels who are active in the Democratic Republic of the Congo, where they are able to obtain a ready supply of arms and ammunition for their bases in Tanzania, as they have not been able to re-establish those they lost in South Kivu in 1997 after the first war in the Democratic Republic of the Congo.

Thirdly, the countries of the region must wage a common struggle against transnational rebel movements, arms trafficking and genocidal ideology. Those movements have created alliances without borders. Among the rebels who operate in Burundi are the Interahamwe, the former Rwandan armed forces and Ugandan rebels, among others. The Burundi rebellion has become regional in scope and must be combated from that perspective. Intensified activity has been noted on the part of the factions in the Democratic Republic of the Congo since the Lusaka agreement, which provided for their disarmament. The conflict is thus being regionalized, with Burundi and/or Tanzania as its epicentre.

Prevention is better than cure. There is a real risk of another regional conflagration resulting from the countries concerned taking measures to protect themselves against these widespread rebellions. In any case, the Government will find it difficult to sign the peace agreement if it is not preceded by an effective halt to the violence on the ground. The population, parts of which are still being massacred, would simply reject it.

The third — although not the least significant — obstacle to the peace process is the extreme poverty that threatens the people of Burundi with social and economic annihilation. That poverty is not the result of a reduction in agricultural production, which has continued somehow thanks to the hard-working nature of our countryfolk. Nor is it the result of the embargo imposed by the countries of the region, since economic and financial cooperation with those countries was and still is very limited. It results above all from the freezing of bilateral and multilateral cooperation by certain partners, countries and financial institutions in line with the economic sanctions imposed by the subregion. Those regional sanctions were suspended on 23 January this year, and Burundi expected that, *mutatis mutandis*, our international partners would resume their cooperation in conformity with the subregional action. That has not yet happened, and some financial institutions, which anticipate no practical problems, are blocked by their shareholders at the political level. It is said that we will have to wait for the signing, or even the implementation, of the Arusha Agreement.

Peace and national reconciliation in Burundi will not be restored through revolution. It is a process that will be consolidated over time. Nothing spectacular will happen the day the peace agreement is signed. It is progressive reform activities, taking place as a result of courageous and determined political will, that will stabilize the country over the months and years following the signing of the agreement. All the parties involved in the negotiations agrees that peace will be not an event, but a process. Furthermore, the rate at which negotiations proceed will not be subject to the Government's control; it will be linked to the procedures followed by the mediators and to the willingness of the 17 other parties to the negotiations to place the national interest above all else, to distinguish between what is essential and what is of secondary importance, and to realize that the true road to peace will begin after the signing of the Arusha Agreement, among the citizens of Burundi themselves.

The Government of Burundi calls on its partners to reassess the situation and consider the realities on the ground as a matter of great urgency. The extreme stress under which the population has been suffering for six years is pushing it towards a popular uprising. The responsibility lies with the international community, which is committed in this respect. The Government has provided all it can: proof of its irreversible political will to negotiate until a peace agreement is reached.

The Great Lakes region has become a real powder keg because of the persistence of insecurity. With regard to the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Burundi welcomes the signing in July of the Lusaka Peace Agreement. We call on all the parties to that conflict to continue to make efforts to restore a climate of dialogue, trust and reconciliation, so that energy can be concentrated on actions aimed at economic recovery and development.

Burundi is not a belligerent in the war that is pitting the Democratic Republic of the Congo against some of its

neighbours. The Government of Burundi has already had the opportunity to explain that fact to the international community on several occasions in various forums, including from this lofty rostrum last year; in Lusaka, where it participated in all the meetings as an observer and as one of the countries neighbouring the Democratic Republic of the Congo that were concerned about the security of their common border; and in meetings of the Organization of African Unity.

Listening to the statement made in this Assembly by the Chairman of the delegation of the Democratic Republic of the Congo on 29 September, I was astonished by his confusion and the degree of malice he expressed towards my country, Burundi. I should like to respond by making several comments.

First, Burundi is not at war with the Democratic Republic of the Congo, either individually or in alliance with any other party.

Second, Burundi has no reason to be at war with the Democratic Republic of the Congo. It is true that it is poor and that the Democratic Republic of the Congo is rich. But Burundi has never wanted, does not want, and will never want to live off the Democratic Republic of the Congo. It will develop a policy of normal cooperation with that country, as has always been the case, in particular within the Economic Community of the Great Lakes Countries. Furthermore, the trading arrangements that exist between the border towns and border provinces do not cause Burundi any problems and should continue.

Third, Burundi has no political ambitions in the Democratic Republic of the Congo, at either the central or the provincial level.

Fourth, Burundi had just signed an agreement for cooperation on border security when war broke out.

Fifth, Burundi has adopted an attitude of strict neutrality with regard to the conflict, and has no interest in it.

Sixth, several months after war broke out Burundi was informed of the presence among the Congolese troops of the armed Burundi rebel movement, the FDD. Burundi's assessment was that the FDD had a threefold objective: first, to obtain arms and munitions to strengthen their bases in Tanzania; secondly, to cross Lake Tanganyika and recover the bases they had lost in south Kivu facing the capital, Bujumbura, and the provinces of Bubanza and Cibitoke, where the civil war broke out in 1994; and, thirdly, to obstruct trade on Lake Tanganyika to and from Burundi through the port of Mpulungu in Zambia, which is the only import-export corridor remaining following the economic blockade imposed by the region in an attempt to suffocate the country.

Seventh, Burundi had to defend itself, and decided to adopt necessary border defence and security measures on land and on Lake Tanganyika in order to counter-attack the FDD rebels. It was a question of life or death. Those measures will remain in place as long as the threat of insecurity caused by the FDD, and coming from the Democratic Republic of the Congo, remains.

That is the absolute truth. The allegations made by the delegation of the Democratic Republic of the Congo that Burundi is acting aggressively towards their country, are groundless and based on invention and misinformation. Burundi is ready to do all it can to help to resolve the conflict. It welcomes in particular the fact that two military observers were sent to Burundi in the framework of the pre-deployment exercise decided upon by the United Nations.

Burundi cannot fail to welcome the prospects for a final resolution of the crisis in the Democratic Republic of the Congo, which would immediately remove the threat of insecurity at the common border and, we hope, involve the FDD rebels in the peace process in Burundi.

At this final General Assembly session of the millennium, my delegation hails the giant steps taken by mankind in science and technology, information and communication, democracy and development — especially during the twentieth century, which is now drawing to a close. At the same time, we deplore the scourges that have marked this century, such as all manner of wars and conflicts and a range of evils and natural or man-made catastrophes. Our greatest wish is that the new millennium will bolster our achievements and add new triumphs for the well-being of the whole of mankind. We want to see in the next millennium a world in which peace will prevail over conflict, justice over injustice and impunity, freedom over oppression and generosity over selfishness.

We seek the creation of a world in which the gap between rich countries and poor countries will be bridged; a world in which all men and all women will live decent lives, work in peace and eat their fill; a world in which the concepts of freedom, democracy,

brotherhood and development can have true meaning in every corner of the earth.

For all peoples and all nations to set about attaining these purposes, the United Nations must play the role of vanguard and catalyst to generate and maximize all the necessary energy. The key to such success is, first and foremost, peace. The peace that we desire for Africa we also want to see benefitting all mankind everywhere on earth.

The President: I call next on the Minister for Foreign Affairs and Regional Cooperation of Rwanda, His Excellency Mr. Augustin Iyamuremye.

Mr. Iyamuremye (Rwanda) (*spoke in French*): I wish first of all, on behalf of my delegation, to join other speakers in congratulating you, Sir, on your unanimous election to the presidency of the General Assembly at its fifty-fourth session. The tact and insight you have displayed from the outset bode well for the success of our work.

I also pay tribute to His Excellency Mr. Didier Opertti, who guided the work of the Assembly at its fifty-third session, and to His Excellency Mr. Kofi Annan for his timely report on the work of the Organization and for the important statement he delivered to the General Assembly.

On behalf of my country, I welcome the new Members of the United Nations: the Republic of Kiribati, the Republic of Nauru and the Kingdom of Tonga. We congratulate them warmly on joining the great United Nations family.

During the twentieth century, which is now drawing to a close, the world has been profoundly affected by many striking events. In the sphere of technology, for example, we have seen great progress leading to the expansion of communication to the point where the world has become a global village. The world rejoices at its liberation from apartheid and from colonialism in nearly all countries. Here, my delegation welcomes the endeavours of the United Nations, including its focus on the solidarity that is the foundation of our Organization, which led to that success.

But those positive achievements do not mean that all has been perfect in the twentieth century. In fact, a variety of disasters and tragedies inflicted on humans by humans continue to ravage mankind. Despite scientific progress, epidemics continue to take human lives by the thousand. Two particularly dreadful world wars devastated the world. Hateful acts of genocide have been committed.

In that connection, my country, Rwanda, had the misfortune in 1994 to be the victim of a genocide that took more than a million lives. Planned and organized by the government machinery of the day, that genocide was carried out in full view of the international community, which was unable to stop it. The people of Rwanda appeals to the conscience of the international community never again to permit such a tragedy anywhere in the world. We have every right to expect this.

As we express that wish, investigations have been carried out by countries such as Belgium and France, and others, by the Organization of African Unity and the United Nations, are under way to identify those responsible for the genocide in Rwanda. We want those responsible to be subject to punishment throughout the world.

Further, we welcome the General Assembly address by President Clinton of the United States, in which he referred to the creation of an international coalition against genocide, an idea that had been put forward at the fiftieth session by His Excellency Mr. Pasteur Bizimungu, President of the Rwandese Republic.

In the wake of the genocide, nearly the entire population of Rwanda was displaced. Most Rwandese were widows, of whom 34 per cent had become heads of household. There were thousands of orphans, most of whom had also become heads of their households. Many children were involved in these acts of genocide; they deserve to be reeducated in an appropriate setting. My Government has an ambitious programme to take up the challenge of helping survivors of the genocide coexist with the perpetrators.

We are fortunate today that thanks to the vigorous measures which have been taken and to the support of the international community, my Government has been able to ensure security throughout its territory, bring the refugees home and house them, get the economy back on track and ensure food security.

After the genocide of 1994, Rwanda found itself with its judicial system completely destroyed and its prisons crammed with suspects. The Government therefore began rebuilding the national judicial system and collaborated in establishing international judicial

machinery to deal with that heinous crime against humanity, genocide.

I must pay a tribute here to the international community, which came to my country's assistance by establishing the United Nations International Criminal Tribunal for Rwanda (ICTR). But we must highlight that although we welcome the establishment of the Tribunal, we regret the slowness of its trial procedures and its sometimes secretive way of choosing suspects to try. The Government of Rwanda states that it is nevertheless willing to collaborate with the Tribunal and to do everything possible to speed up its proceedings.

One of the difficulties involved in arresting the criminals who committed genocide in Rwanda is that when the Government that organized the genocide fell, all its various acolytes scattered throughout the world. Fortunately, some of them have been arrested with the assistance of the countries that took them in. We wish to pay a ringing tribute to the fraternal countries that have arrested and extradited criminals sought by the Tribunal for Rwanda. We urge them to continue their cooperation and call on those that have not yet been able to do so to fulfil this obligation to humankind.

We note with satisfaction also that in his report (S/1999/957) on the protection of civilians in armed conflict, the Secretary-General recommends to the Security Council that it should make full cooperation obligatory between Member States with the International Criminal Tribunals for Rwanda and for Yugoslavia. We note also that this recommendation by the Secretary-General is in line with the wishes of the several speakers who have spoken up either in the Security Council or here in the Assembly, against the culture impunity. In this we find hope that there will never again, anywhere in the world, be a genocide.

I would mention another very important programme by my Government: for national reconciliation and to establish the constitutional rule of law. As part of the programme, my Government has established two commissions: the National Commission for Human Rights and the Commission for National Unity and Reconciliation. The mission of these two commissions is to promote the positive values of mutual respect and national reconciliation which, along with education in participatory democracy, are the top priorities for the people of Rwanda.

Concerning the democratization of our institutions, it is a pleasure for me to announce from this rostrum that the democratization process has started, with local elections, which should ensure, more than before, participation by the population in managing the business of the State. This process also has on its agenda the purpose of giving young people and women a greater role in that management.

The United Nations has a Charter whose principles and purposes serve to guide us towards a world of solidarity, of harmony and security. But there have been many failures despite our common aspirations to peace. This is sufficient proof that the way in which our Organization is functioning betrays its very reason for existence. That is why, during this session, many delegations — and particularly the current President of the Organization of African Unity (OAU), Mr. Abdelaziz Bouteflika — have shown that reform of the United Nations and, more particularly, of the Security Council is both necessary and urgent. We join those delegations that have already spoken in favour of this long-awaited reform.

A few moments ago I referred to the great achievements of science. Here, I could not fail to mention the concept of globalization. Convinced of the benefits of trade and between peoples, we in Rwanda believe that this new system brings with it new hopes. Nevertheless, we fear that the structural differences between our various economies will require altering the expectations of our peoples, whom globalization is supposed to serve. We therefore believe that the effectiveness of globalization will be measured in terms of how it contributes to resolving such sensitive questions as the poverty eradication, the debt burden, and peace and security.

Another factor for the success of globalization is the establishment of viable regional economic arrangements through integration based on cooperation between developing countries. We are happy that Africa has already started to move in this direction, whether within OAU or the African Economic Community or in subregional organizations. We are very pleased also to note the contribution of the economic organizations in Africa, not only to the development effort but also to conflict prevention and resolution.

In this connection we applaud the role the Southern African Development Community (SADC) countries have played in preventing and resolving conflicts in the subregion. We likewise applaud the regional and bilateral initiatives that have given rise to such great hopes for

peace, particularly in West Africa, in the Horn of Africa, in the Middle East between Israel and Palestine, in East Timor and in the Balkan region. We do earnestly request the international community to support these efforts.

I particularly applaud the efforts of the Secretary-General and the resolve he has shown in increasing the efficiency of the United Nations in the area of peace and international security. The delegation of Rwanda, for its part, contributed to the discussions of the Security Council on 17 and 30 September this year (S/PV.4046 (Resumption 1) and S/PV.4049 (Resumption 2)), on conflict in Africa. In this respect, my delegation truly appreciates the very important contribution of the President of Zambia, Frederick Chiluba, in Security Council discussions (S/PV.4047).

The Agreement on a ceasefire in the Democratic Republic of Congo signed in Lusaka on 10 July 1999 (S/1999/815) is a commitment by the signatories to respect and participate fully in the peace process. Two important clauses support this agreement: first, the clause on inter-Congolese political negotiations towards a new political order in the Democratic Republic of the Congo; and secondly, the clause on pursuing and disarming the armed groups, including former Rwandan soldiers and the Interahamwe militias who perpetrated the genocide of 1994 and later became integrated into the army of the Democratic Republic of the Congo. The Agreement also provides for various methods by which it is to be put into effect, and also contains clauses that will help preserve it in both spirit and letter.

In this respect, I recall that subparagraph b of paragraph 2 of article 1 of the Agreement requires the signatories parties to cease hostile propaganda, the goal is to ensure that the Ceasefire Agreement is respected. Nevertheless, the Minister for Foreign Affairs of the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Mr. Ndombasi, from this rostrum, violently attacked my country, Rwanda. There is no need for me to revisit those outrageous accusations, because our representative has had the occasion to explain our intervention in the crisis in the Democratic Republic of the Congo. I simply wish to respond to one of his concerns, many times repeated in his statement.

The Minister for Foreign Affairs of the Democratic Republic of the Congo several times over asked this Assembly to intercede with Rwanda so that Rwanda withdraws from the Democratic Republic of the Congo.

By way of response, I declare before this Assembly that Rwanda welcomes and supports the outcome of the African initiative and urges the international community to give its unconditional support to the implementation of the terms of this Agreement by all the parties, which must refrain from any violation of the ceasefire. Unfortunately, we are receiving news that the contrary is happening, for those who call for implementation of the ceasefire are the first to violate it.

Mr. Jusys (Lithuania), Vice-President, took the Chair.

For two years already, the Kinshasa Government has been training, equipping and enrolling in its own army ex-officers of the former Rwandan armed forces who committed acts of genocide and should be prosecuted. Furthermore, these officers, who directed the genocide, are on the headquarters staff of the army of the Democratic Republic of the Congo. As the representative of Burundi has just said, these armed elements are fomenting insecurity and propagating the idea of genocide throughout the region.

Now that the Lusaka Agreement has been signed by all the parties to the conflict, we dare to hope that a United Nations peacekeeping force will be deployed as soon as possible, and that soon peace will reign in our subregion. May this Agreement enjoy the full support of the entire international community.

The Acting President: I now give the floor to the First Deputy Minister for Foreign Affairs of Kyrgyzstan, His Excellency Mr. Alikbek Djekshenkulov.

Mr. Djekshenkulov (Kyrgyzstan) (*spoke in Russian*): First of all, I would like on behalf of the delegation of the Kyrgyz Republic to congratulate Mr. Theo-Ben Gurirab on his election as President of the General Assembly for the current session. We hope that, as a result of his great experience, our work during this session will be successful.

At the threshold of the third millennium a most pressing issue is facing humanity: the establishment of the new world order, which will affect the nature of the world in the future. The issue concerns all members of the international community, regardless of their place or the role they play in international relations.

The continuing threat of the proliferation of weapons of mass destruction; problems involving the protection of

the environment; technological and natural disasters; unresolved conflicts, terrorism and all forms of extremism, illegal trafficking in narcotics; the arms trade — these are serious sources of tension throughout the world. Recent events related to the settlement of the problem of Kosovo are another reminder of the huge price that continues to be paid in human suffering.

Kyrgyzstan is striving to make a positive contribution to the achievement of the global goal of establishing a new world order founded on security, stability and prosperity. We wish to demonstrate to the international community our commitment to such universal principles as democracy, respect for human rights, support for market economies, the pursuit of good-neighbourly relations, stability and security — not only in our region but throughout the world.

The years since our independence have convinced us that for Kyrgyzstan there is no more rational foreign policy than a balanced, multipolar approach focusing on the development of friendly, consistent relations both with States that play an important role in regional and world affairs and with those in which our country shares pragmatic interests.

Among the major international events for the Kyrgyz Republic in recent years I wish to mention the admission of our country into the World Trade Organization; the adoption, at the fifty-third session of the General Assembly, of a resolution — resolution 53/24 — proclaiming the year 2002 as the International Year of Mountains; and the elaboration by Askar Akayev, President of the Kyrgyz Republic, of the Silk Road diplomacy doctrine.

President Akayev's Silk Road foreign policy is based on the ideas of global interdependence and of reviving the Silk Road as a bridge joining countries and civilizations so as to develop in the third millennium an intensive, multilevel, multifaceted system of communication between civilizations. It is no accident that the philosophy behind the Silk Road diplomacy doctrine carries over to the Republic's other foreign policy initiatives of recent years. These include the holding in Kyrgyzstan, under the auspices of the United Nations, of an international conference on Afghanistan; the proclamation of the year 2002 as the International Year of Mountains; and the active participation of Kyrgyzstan in the establishment of a Central Asian nuclear-weapon-free zone.

In particular, enshrined in the doctrine is the idea that, given the current situation, reliable and dynamic political and commercial relations cannot be established without the strengthening of multilateral relations of mutual cooperation and trust between all the States of the region. The Silk Road policy requires Kyrgyzstan to establish and develop as fully as possible such relations with the countries of Central Asia in all sectors and cooperative areas, including the maintenance of regional and global security.

The mutual cooperation of China, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Russia and Tajikistan within the framework of what is called the Shanghai Five is one of the most positive factors for the maintenance of security in Central Asia, and for Central Asia's development, and for its transformation into a region of peace, good-neighbourly relations and prosperity. Since the first meeting of the heads of State of the Shanghai Five and the signing of the agreement on confidence-building in connection with military activities in the border areas, the countries involved have, through friendly consultations, been able to generally settle border issues and reduce the armed forces present in the border areas. We have established and strengthened cooperation and with it increased security, peace and calm along the borders.

From 24 to 25 August 1999, in Bishkek, the fourth summit of the heads of State of the Shanghai Five took place. As participants pointed out, we are now seeing a transformation among the Shanghai Five. Whereas in the past the group focused on military and political cooperation, now it is defining major directions for trade and economic cooperation. The role of the Bishkek summit in this context was to transform these understandings into practical actions.

It is necessary specifically to point out the unique format of the five in the context of which countries of varying size, with different state systems, levels of economic development and military strength are cooperating. A concrete demonstration of this was the signing in Bishkek of an additional border agreement between China and Kyrgyzstan, which effectively removed from the agenda the question of inter-State demarcation and established a real basis for the transformation of the Kyrgyzstan-China border into a border of peace and mutual cooperation in the twenty-first century.

Kyrgyzstan continues to participate actively in the process of creating a nuclear-weapon-free zone in Central

Asia. An important role in the successful implementation of this initiative is being played by the consultative meeting of experts of regional countries, held under United Nations auspices. We feel that the rapid conversion of Central Asia into a nuclear-weapon-free zone is becoming a multidimensional issue, since the achievement of this goal will favour profound positive progress on the global, regional and subregional levels, as well as in the area of bilateral relations between the countries of our region. It will also be in harmony with the world community's aspirations to establish a safe nuclear-free future.

As is well known, dramatic events have recently taken place in southern Kyrgyzstan in connection with the incursion into Kyrgyz territory of well-armed bandit groups of international terrorists with many years of experience fighting in Afghanistan and Tajikistan. As a result of the illegal actions of these terrorists, who are members of the implacable radical wing of Islamic extremism, a tense situation has emerged in the Batken and Chon-Alai areas of Osh Province. International terrorists have behaved barbarically, taking foreign hostages and murdering peaceful citizens. The bandits and the forces behind them have made brazen, arrogant and far-reaching attempts to impose their extremist views on the country and have decisively and irrevocably chosen the path of attacking peaceful democratic States and economic and social reforms. They have threatened the security and destroyed the tranquility of each and every State of Central Asia.

We are deeply concerned at having to confront such phenomena as the internationalization of Islamic extremism. Among the terrorists invading our country, we have observed not only representatives of States of Central Asia, but also foreign mercenaries. Events in southern Kyrgyzstan and in Dagestan, Russia, are links in the same chain, forged by international Islamic extremists seeking their own criminal objectives. These international bandits seek refuge behind the noble values of Islam, which they roughly flout, sowing death and suffering among peaceful populations.

I wish to stress in particular the staunch and committed support of our friendly neighbours — including Kazakhstan, Tajikistan, Uzbekistan and Russia — for Kyrgyzstan's efforts to eradicate these bandit groups. The States of the region have shown the international community their firm desire to work together and to coordinate their efforts in confronting international terrorism.

In turn, Kyrgyzstan expresses its deep-seated hope for reciprocal support from the world community in its struggle against international terrorism, which is a worldwide threat. In this context, Kyrgyzstan highly commends the support and solidarity of the States members of the Conference on Interaction and Confidence-building Measures in Asia, meeting at the level of Foreign Ministers in Almaty on 14 September. The Conference adopted a joint declaration on the situation in Kyrgyzstan in which it condemned the criminal activities of terrorists and expressed solidarity and support for my Government's fight against terrorism.

The criminal acts of international terrorists in southern Kyrgyzstan have reinforced the need for a speedy settlement of the armed conflict in Afghanistan. It is becoming ever more apparent that the designs of the Islamic extremists based in Afghanistan and of the forces behind them are spreading their destabilizing influence throughout Central Asia through terror, murder, hostage-taking and drug and weapons trafficking. In this connection, I wish particularly to point out that the ongoing illegal transshipment of narcotics from Afghanistan across the territories of the Central Asian countries is a primary source of financing for the criminal activities of the Islamic extremists. We feel that the world community must take the most decisive measures to prevent these Islamic extremists from sowing violence, chaos and triumphal obscurantism in Central Asia.

Kyrgyzstan intends broadly to support the efforts of the international community in the context of the "six plus two" group. In turn, striving to make our own contribution to the early settlement of the internal Afghanistan conflict, which has become a breeding ground for Islamic extremism in the region, our country is ready to provide facilities for the convening, under United Nations auspices, of a conference on peace in Afghanistan.

Highly appreciating the importance to the international community of the United Nations as a universal Organization, Kyrgyzstan is profoundly interested in the successful reform of its work. We support comprehensive reform, which should encompass all the organs of the United Nations, including the Security Council, which must vigorously address all aspects of human development. The Kyrgyz Republic confirms its view of the need to expand Security Council membership and is also in favour of equitable geographical representation in both categories.

There is no doubt that the process of reforming the United Nations should reflect upon the work of all its agencies. In our country today, we are seeing the successful work of such United Nations specialized agencies as the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), the United Nations Children's Fund, the United Nations Population Fund, the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees and others. We feel that effectiveness and results are the main criteria in assessing their work. It is necessary to give heightened attention to the work of those agencies from which we can obtain maximum output. In this connection, there needs to be more active efforts to enhance the quality of work to implement concrete measures designed to resolve socio-economic, cultural, humanitarian and legal issues.

In this respect, I wish to highlight the important role played by UNDP, as the Organization's basic financing and coordination agency, to strengthen United Nations development efforts in such countries as Kyrgyzstan. In 1998, Kyrgyzstan became a pilot country in UNDP's new result-based approach. The results of the work of this system, which have been mainstreamed in all UNDP offices and headquarters, are being planned for use in a multi-year funding framework. We hope that this system will become an effective means of attracting additional funding. In this connection, we cannot fail to be concerned by the reduction in and unpredictability of UNDP core resources. We wish to appeal from this rostrum to the Governments of donor countries to undertake to study closely the possibility of increasing, through UNDP, their assistance to States with economies in transition.

In this difficult period for countries such as my own, assistance rendered through UNDP and other specialized agencies is an important factor in the strengthening of our independence, stability and progress.

In conclusion, I wish to stress Kyrgyzstan's readiness to cooperate with all Members of the United Nations in achieving progress on a broad number of issues on the agenda of this final session of the millennium.

The Acting President: I now give the floor to the Minister for Foreign Affairs of Liberia, His Excellency Mr. Monie Captan.

Mr. Captan (Liberia): On the occasion of the fifty-fourth session of the General Assembly, marking our last meeting in this century, I am humbled to address this body on behalf of President Charles Ghankay Taylor, the Government and the people of Liberia.

It gives me great pleasure to congratulate the President most cordially on his election to preside over this fifty-fourth session and to assure him of my delegation's support and cooperation during the session. When we give consideration to the scope of his diplomatic experience, the expanse of his wisdom and the integrity of his heart, we can only conclude that this is his hour, when his qualifications bespeak eloquently his ability to preside over the Assembly.

I recall my country's involvement in the struggle for Namibia's independence, and I am proud that, just about a decade after achieving independence through the sustained diplomacy of the Organization of African Unity (OAU) and the United Nations, Namibia is serving in such a high capacity. Significantly, it presides over the agenda of the last session of the General Assembly of the twentieth century, where constructive discourse on new paradigms for peace, development and social progress will shape the new millennium.

I pay tribute to Mr. Didier Opertti of Uruguay. We have witnessed his many attributes, especially his wise stewardship of the fifty-third session, which has laid the basis for this one. I therefore offer to Mr. Opertti best wishes in his future callings.

For many reasons, I would like to express special appreciation and gratitude to the Secretary-General, Mr. Kofi Annan. My focus is on his innovative leadership at the helm of this world body. In particular, I note that only two years since his introduction of system-wide reforms the Organization has been geared in the direction of rendering improved and better services and better handling of world situations. We recollect the happy moments of his visit in July to Liberia, which gave further testimony to the Secretary-General's commitment to solving the problems of Africa. The Government and people of Liberia are deeply proud that the United Nations leadership has focused on the search for sustained peace in our region, especially in the work of the United Nations Peace-building Support Office in Liberia, which has been instrumental in the consolidation of peace in Liberia.

We heartily welcome the admission of three new members: the Kingdom of Tonga, the Republic of Nauru and the Republic of Kiribati. We look forward to their contribution to the ideals of the United Nations.

It is encouraging to note that the inflexible attitudes generated by the cold war have been superseded by

dialogue. For the promise of a better future, innovative and alternative efforts are required in all areas of human endeavour. Accordingly, the world is experiencing a transformation in international relations. At the dawn of a new millennium, we are moving from confrontation to cooperation. Nation States continue their search within subregional organizations for the stabilization of civil order, the elimination of human suffering and the maintenance of peace. Liberia reaffirms its commitment to the concept of world peace that is sustainable in context and global in approach. Hence, we believe that equal treatment should be accorded to all conflicts, wherever they might occur.

Liberia takes a dim view of the disparity in the resources committed by the Security Council to the conflicts in Kosovo and East Timor, on the one hand, and the Democratic Republic of the Congo, on the other. Regarding the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Liberia commends President Chiluba of Zambia for his mediatory role, which led to the signing of the Lusaka Agreement by all the concerned parties. We endorse his recent request to the Security Council that it authorize and support the deployment of a peacekeeping force in the Democratic Republic of the Congo, with an appropriate mandate.

Following the relaxation of tension in international relations, there should be a renewed determination on the part of us all to search for creative avenues to resolve civil conflicts and promote regional, political and economic cooperation for the prosperity of all peoples.

At the onset of his assumption of national leadership, following free and fair elections, President Charles Taylor embarked upon sound programmes aimed at achieving national reconciliation, the resettlement of all refugees and internally displaced persons, the rehabilitation and the reintegration of ex-combatants and reconstruction. Not only is our Government making every effort to achieve these specific goals; we are also committed to improving the quality of life of our people.

In this regard, President Taylor's Administration remains committed to three cardinal principles: ensuring national unity through national reconciliation, resettlement and reconstruction; good governance through accountability, efficiency and transparency; and the guaranteed protection of human rights.

Regarding good governance, I should like to state that mechanisms for revenue collection have improved and expenditure has been strictly controlled to ensure prudent fiscal and monetary management and public accountability. Our human rights record has improved tremendously and remains the focal point in our continued efforts to meet the challenges of national reconciliation. In furtherance of this objective, President Taylor holds regular consultations with leaders of the opposition, civil society, religious groups and the media on matters of national interest.

I should also mention that in response to President Taylor's policy of inclusion, opposition political leaders in May this year toured the United States and certain European capitals to further sensitize the international community and donor Governments to post-conflict problems confronting Liberia and to seek assistance.

The Secretary-General, in his statement to the fourth Ministerial Meeting of the ad hoc Special Conference on Liberia, held on 3 October 1997, highlighted the Government's commitment to national reconstruction. He urged the international community to render necessary assistance to achieve this goal. Accordingly, a donors' conference on Liberia was held in Paris, France, in April 1998. The amount of $230 million was pledged for Liberia's national reconstruction programme. However, it is disheartening to note that donors have not yet honoured their commitments. We earnestly appeal to them to give humane consideration to the difficult circumstances of post-conflict reconstruction. We are eager to rejuvenate the economy, revitalize productive activities, restore the social infrastructure and improve the standard of living for all Liberians. Unfortunately, these efforts cannot be launched without support and assistance from the international community.

The evolving trends of globalization pose enormous threats to weak and vulnerable nations, which are continuously marginalized in a global economic system. For most developing countries, particularly the least developed countries, which include Liberia, the debt overhang and the unequal levels of trade are perennial problems for their socio-economic development and reintegration into the world economy.

The huge debt burden inherited by Liberia remains a major obstacle in our post-war reconstruction efforts. Our debt stock is $3 billion. This means that each Liberian man, woman and child carries a debt burden of $1,200. In a country where the per capita income is barely $275 it may never be possible to fully repay this colossal financial obligation. Additionally, the cost of rehabilitation and resettlement makes it imperative that

consideration be given to our request for debt relief. We are continuously undertaking economic reforms to deal with the massive demands of our people and the international community. In view of all that, we call on our creditors to consider relieving Liberia of this enormous financial burden.

Debt relief should be considered on a humanitarian basis against the background that such a move would consolidate existing peace, enhance rehabilitation and foster social and political stability. We believe that it would be supportive of Liberia's desire for inclusion in the evolving global economy.

The resolution of the Liberian civil crisis would not have been possible without the close cooperation that existed between the international community and the Liberian people. We believe that the high level of collaboration between Liberia and the international community should continue to guide our future endeavours in post-conflict Liberia so that the gains made by all stakeholders will not be lost.

Of major concern in our reconstruction, rehabilitation and healing programme is the condition of women and children, for no amount of planning for reconstruction can ever succeed if the plight of women and children is ignored. Thus, we are implementing programmes that refocus their emphasis towards pursuing educational opportunities and safeguarding the rights of women and children.

Over the past two years Liberia has repeatedly sought the lifting of the 1992 arms embargo imposed on it by the Security Council. Our request is based on a principled legal stance that the Liberian civil war, which had necessitated the imposition of the embargo, effectively ended on 2 August 1997 with the installation of a duly elected civilian Government. Thus, the intent of the arms embargo, which was to contain the war and the proliferation of arms in Liberia, is no longer necessary.

In our submission to the Council requesting that the embargo be lifted, we referred to the 1996-1997 final communiqué of the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS), by which that regional organization lifted all sanctions and embargoes on Liberia and called upon the international community to do the same. It is important to note that it was ECOWAS that saw the need to impose an arms embargo on Liberia and to request the international community, including the Security Council, to support the embargo.

The Government of Liberia continues to stress that the arms embargo presently imposed against Liberia by the Security Council is unjust. There are no defined criteria or time limit for its lifting. It has been expanded in perpetuity without any explanation. The Government of Liberia reiterates that the continued refusal by the Security Council to lift the arms embargo is a clear infringement of Liberia's sovereignty, which the United Nations Charter defends. Like all Member States, Liberia has the unqualified right to defend itself and all those within its borders. The attitude of the Council on this matter imputes partial sovereignty and has hindered the freedom of a Charter Member of this Organization.

The arms embargo has created an imbalance, with the potential for adverse consequences for peace and security. The substantial advance of the destruction of arms in Liberia was followed by cross-border aggression. The arms embargo on Liberia does not contribute to peace in the subregion; rather, it contributes to a fragile situation of insecurity and suspicion, which could lead to instability. Such an untenable condition need not exist in a region with a high population of refugees and former combatants, poverty and deteriorating socio-economic conditions.

In our continued efforts to prevent the proliferation of arms left over from the civil war, and to ensure regional peace and stability, on 25 July 1999 the Government of Liberia decided to destroy arms and ammunition collected from the then warring parties during the disarmament process. This destruction exercise is being carried out with the assistance of the United Nations, ECOWAS and the United States Government. Most of the ammunition and arms have been destroyed. The arms and ammunition destroyed as of 10 September 1999 are as follows: 3,156,156 total rounds of ammunition of all sizes and 19,297 total weapons of all sizes. Following are the categories of weapons that were destroyed: 18,420 small arms; 626 heavy machine guns; 150 anti-tank launchers; 63 mortars; 26 recoilless rifles; 9 guns and howitzers; and 3 rocket launchers. The total is 19,297.

The destruction of these arms and ammunition does not negate the necessity of lifting the arms embargo. The former represents a clear departure from war mode to the institution of a culture of peace. The latter restores Liberia's sovereign right to equip and maintain a national armoury under the aegis of a restructured national army to ensure proper accountability and fulfil the elected

Government's constitutional responsibility for national security.

Liberia's international efforts are geared towards peace and security, primarily in our subregion and generally in the world. Our stability is inextricably linked to security in the West African subregion. It is within this context that President Taylor took bold initiatives which significantly contributed to peace in Sierra Leone. Liberia always felt that the conflict in Sierra Leone was primarily internal. Our persistence to bring about a negotiated settlement, rather than the use of force and violence, emanated from our national experience with the futility and destructiveness of armed confrontation.

In this connection, my Government participated in various talks, which led to the signing of the historic Lomé Peace Agreement. Presently, Liberia is hosting two leaders of the Sierra Leonean conflict in Monrovia in order to resolve internal differences and facilitate their early return to Freetown for the smooth implementation of the Agreement. My Government is genuinely committed to the Sierra Leonean peace process and will do everything to ensure that peace and normalcy return to that sister Republic.

We concur with the Secretary-General's recommendation to the Security Council on the establishment of a United Nations peacekeeping force for Sierra Leone; this, we believe, will sustain and strengthen the efforts of ECOWAS.

Liberia has been concerned about its borders with neighbouring countries, especially Guinea. We have witnessed two incidents of armed aggression along our northern border, which resulted in the loss of life, property and the displacement of people. In this regard, we appeal to the international community to provide us with all the necessary assistance to enable our Government to cope with the problems of refugees and internally displaced persons, as well as to address the humanitarian crises created as a result of the attack by dissidents. We are indeed gratified that the Secretary-General has added his voice to the appeal for assistance.

Liberia is committed to finding a diplomatic solution to the problem along the Guinea-Liberia border and reaffirms its adherence to the practice of good-neighbourliness. We call on the international community to duly consider the vulnerability of the subregion due to the large volume of refugees and the attendant humanitarian crisis. My Government is of the strong conviction that dialogue and cooperation between and among neighbours will enhance security, peace and stability in the subregion. Accordingly, at a mini-summit of the heads of State and Government of the Economic Community of West African States, (ECOWAS) held in Abuja, Nigeria on 16 September 1999, Liberia reached an understanding with Guinea relative to security and cooperation. We therefore call on the international community to lend its support to the efforts aimed at reactivating the Mano River Union.

Since 1992, Africa has experienced numerous impediments to its economic development. There has been a continuous decline in its exports, imports and the flow of direct foreign investment and overseas development assistance. This situation is compounded by the increasing debt burden, estimated at $300 billion. These negative trends hamper Africa's integration into the global economy, thus leading to its marginalization. We therefore call for the creation of a more favourable economic environment that taken into account the unique problems of Africa.

We congratulate the Secretary-General on the measures he has taken in helping create a favourable economic environment for Africa, as outlined in his "Progress report on the implementation of the recommendations contained in the report on the causes of conflict and the promotion of durable peace and sustainable development in Africa" (S/1999/1008). Furthermore, we reaffirm our commitment to the provisions of the Algiers Declaration of the Organization of African Unity (OAU) with respect to the establishment of a genuine international partnership.

We welcome the offer of the United States President Bill Clinton to forgive the debts of the world's poorest countries, including Liberia.

As a signatory to the Convention on the Rights of the Child, my Government has taken measures to improve the environment for nurturing and developing the child. We hereby reiterate our commitment to the rehabilitation and reintegration of children into civil society, in accordance with the Maputo Declaration adopted by the OAU. We therefore call upon the international community to provide support for efforts in this regard.

Liberia firmly believes that the unification of China should be peacefully pursued and that although it is a matter for the Chinese people themselves to determine,

there is nonetheless a need for the United Nations to examine the exceptional international situation pertaining to the Republic of China on Taiwan. In so doing it will ensure that the fundamental rights of 22 million people to participate in the work and activities of the United Nations, and it will do honour to this great world body. The Republic of China on Taiwan has contributed substantially to the international community in the area of technical and development assistance and has shown a strong commitment to human rights, democracy, market economy and multilateralism. The unparalleled economic and political development of the Republic of China on Taiwan has brought a strong desire of its people to participate in international activities.

Resolution 2758 (XXVI), however, denies over 22 million people their right to participate in United Nations activities and contravenes the United Nations Charter's principle of universality. Taking into account the changing international climate, characterized by global economic interdependence, it is essential for the United Nations to review this unfair resolution as it steps into a new century. Liberia believes that the Republic of China on Taiwan can play a more important and beneficial role in the United Nations community and that it is willing to play that role. Liberia strongly urges the United Nations to find a speedy and satisfactory resolution to the Republic of China on Taiwan's participation in the United Nations.

In conclusion, since its establishment, the United Nations has represented mankind's legitimate aspirations. Despite its shortcomings, we continue to see it that way. Liberia cannot overemphasize its support for the ongoing reforms of the United Nations. Twenty-five years ago, Liberia called for a review of the United Nations Charter to ensure its effectiveness to cope with some of the fundamental problems that continue to beset the world community.

Although we have not been favoured with the usual level of international support to help speed up the pace of progress in rebuilding our country, Liberia is most grateful for the vital support it has received, especially in the areas of rehabilitation and reintegration of ex-combatants and resettlement of refugees and displaced persons. It may not be intentional, but it is regrettable that the issue of African refugees has received little attention from the international community, as has the issue of the developmental needs of the continent. The United Nations must ensure that on its agenda the treatment of refugees around the globe is not skewed unequally against a particular region.

If this world body will underline the promotion of sustainable development, the pursuit of global peace and the need to safeguard human progress, and if we realize that in order to succeed we ought to rededicate ourselves to high and inspiring objectives, then we can truly ensure the future of all mankind, irrespective of our places of origin.

In Liberia, we have evolved four strategies for the new millennium: first, to eradicate ignorance, disease — particularly the HIV/AIDS pandemic — and poverty, and to promote human rights; secondly, to strengthen the full capacity of the United Nations to effectively preserve the international system; thirdly, to promote universal harmony and globalization; and fourthly, to protect humankind against the scourge of nuclear, chemical and biological warfare, and to preserve our ecosystem.

As we enter a new century, we need to re-evaluate our undertakings and take measures to improve conditions in our world with an unflinching respect for the dignity of humankind.

The Acting President: I now call on the Minister for Foreign Affairs of Maldives, His Excellency Mr. Fathulla Jameel.

Mr. Jameel (Maldives): At the outset, I would like to congratulate Mr. Gurirab on his election to preside over this historic session of the General Assembly. It is a tribute to his rich experience and to his great country, Namibia.

His predecessor, Mr. Didier Opertti of Uruguay, also deserves our appreciation for the excellent manner in which he discharged his important responsibilities.

Permit me also to pay tribute to the Secretary-General, Mr. Kofi Annan, for his dedication and commitment to the ideals of the United Nations.

As we meet for the final session of this century, and, indeed, of this millennium, we are faced with a future that holds for us promises and perils, hopes and fears, opportunities and challenges. We cannot secure a better future unless the root causes of the problems of our times are resolved. The United Nations, as the only truly global Organization, is best suited to address these problems. Its role, therefore, must be reaffirmed and must remain central to our efforts in the reconstruction of a more just world order where human security is guaranteed.

Since the establishment of this Organization, small States have earned a legitimate voice in multilateral diplomacy. I am delighted today to welcome the three new Members of the United Nations, the Republic of Kiribati, the Republic of Nauru and the Kingdom of Tonga. As small States, Maldives and the three new Members share numerous interests and concerns which are vital to our common survival and progress.

We stand at a crossroads. This is an ideal opportunity to review our past performance and to map out innovative approaches to address existing and emerging problems. As we get ready to enter the new century and the new millennium, we in the Maldives have developed Vision 2020 for our country, based on the lessons of the past. The Vision sets out major directions for the next two decades. We envision a community that is just, caring and peaceful. Our country must continue to be one in which good governance, democracy and the welfare of the people are given the highest priority. We seek a society where gender equality is a reality and where everyone has the opportunity for self-actualization. We want our children to be happy, creative and safe.

These aims can be realized only through a high level of economic achievement and social progress. However, our resources are meagre. We face numerous natural hazards and are vulnerable to a wide range of man-made threats. Nevertheless, we remain firm in our determination to achieve the goals we have set for ourselves. But for that to happen, our own efforts must be supplemented by a supportive international environment. That much we need and that much we seek.

Nevertheless, the withdrawal of that supportive framework seems, regrettably, to be imminent. The Maldives has been earmarked for graduation from the list of least developed countries (LDC) next year. We do not feel entirely comfortable with the LDC label. Indeed, we would like to enter the new millennium as a self-reliant country. National pride, however, cannot transcend harsh economic reality. Our economy is small and narrowly based. Capacity for economic diversification in the immediate future is limited. Graduation would therefore impose unbearable burdens on us. The General Assembly is to review the graduation process and its criteria this year. I appeal to you to consider the realities on the ground. I call upon you to look beyond abstract indicators to the inherent vulnerabilities of small States. My President has already conveyed our concerns in detail to the President of the Economic and Social Council. The Commonwealth has strongly supported our case.

The liberalization of trade and the globalization of the economy have created windows of opportunity for increased economic growth. Their impact, though, has created a particularly difficult economic road for developing countries. Globalization must progress without marginalization and without further impoverishment. The seven nations of the South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation (SAARC) are working together to enhance our prospects in the new international economic climate through greater regional cooperation.

Yet, ominously, on a global scale the gulf between rich and poor nations has reached tragic proportions. These harsh economic realities have been accompanied by the fragmentation of the international will to foster greater equality. Aid programmes had previously supplemented domestic savings in recipient countries, but today they are not even adequate to save the destitute, leaving many developing countries with little choice but to replace their visions of advancement with those of survival and life-support. The world's present focus on poverty eradication only underscores its past failure to narrow the gap between the rich and the poor. It is disheartening to note that the gap has more than doubled since 1950.

I am happy that a number of international initiatives on social issues have taken place during this decade. The Maldives attaches great importance to the fulfilment of the Copenhagen commitments and the implementation of the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action. We look forward to their review meetings next year to give a fresh impetus to our action. In South Asia, the Maldives has called for the drawing up of a social charter that will institutionalize social development in the region. We are also pressing for a SAARC convention on regional arrangements to promote and protect child welfare. I hope that the convention will be adopted as we mark the tenth anniversary of the Convention on the Rights of the Child.

The international social agenda is indeed a demanding one. It cannot be addressed by national Governments acting alone. Cooperation among States and partnerships with inter-governmental and non-governmental organizations are essential for victory on this front. At the same time, our approach to economic performance needs to be re-oriented towards human security and ecological safety. We need to temper our obsession over economic growth with concerns for the quality of life. We all accept the importance of sustainable development. We all agree on the need for

effective global action to achieve environment-friendly progress. Yet, the clear message that has emerged from the review of the Barbados Programme of Action completed this week is that of weak commitment and poor implementation. Our deeds must match the sentiments we have expressed. We must deliver on our promises.

Small island developing States have few options that they can pursue on their own. International cooperation is vital to ensure that sustainable development strategies are viable for them. It is also necessary to help them adapt to the dangers posed by global warming and climate change.

As we have reiterated on numerous occasions, the Maldives could very well cease to exist if the sea level rises by one metre. Many other low-lying regions would suffer a similar fate. Should the sea level rise by one metre, the developed countries too would be affected significantly, and the direct impact on biodiversity would be unfathomable. The Maldives is therefore deeply disappointed by the lack of action in implementing the Barbados pledges.

While great Powers may be able to look after their own security needs, the small States need to rely on institutions of collective security. I am happy to recall that 10 years ago, the Assembly adopted resolution 44/51, which recognized that the international community has an obligation to make provision for the protection and security of small States. We are grateful for the support of the international community for our initiative on this issue, but we remain concerned that time and again the response of the United Nations to crises, especially those involving small States, has been found wanting in speed and in effectiveness.

It is a pity that we have to enter the new century and the new millennium still carrying baggage containing many unresolved and deep-seated problems that confronted the United Nations at its birth.

One such problem is the Middle East problem. Peace in the Middle East still remains elusive. Hesitant steps have been taken, but many issues remain unresolved. The Maldives has welcomed the Middle East peace process from the beginning. We are disappointed at its slow progress and look forward to a more earnest and bold search for peace. Once again, we express our full support to the Palestinian cause and call for the full implementation of the relevant United Nations resolutions on lasting peace in the region.

Eight years after the Gulf war, there are still many unresolved issues that affect the security and progress of the region. The Maldives calls upon all parties concerned to fully comply with the resolutions of the United Nations on the subject. We regret the suspension of talks between Kuwait and Iraq on outstanding bilateral issues, including that of missing persons, and believe that the resolution of these issues should be pursued within the existing framework of relevant United Nations resolutions. The Maldives reaffirms its unwavering support for the independence, sovereignty and territorial integrity of Kuwait. We reiterate our belief that the United Nations has an obligation to uphold the security and territorial integrity of all Member States, including smaller States.

The post-cold-war years have seen the bitter betrayal of the promise of greater freedom and development. Rather than seeing a celebration of human rights and the legitimate rights of communities to their own identity and cultural values, arrogant ethnocentrism and intolerance appear to be rampant. Indeed, the violent disintegration of States and civil wars have led to the most gruesome crimes against humanity. Genuine aspirations have often been met with brutal force, as in Bosnia and Kosovo. Protracted disputes, such as in Kashmir, are continuing to exact a high price in human lives and constantly endanger security at both the regional and international levels.

Strategies of nuclear deterrence which presumably rely on the credible threat of mass destruction cannot be justified on moral grounds. We welcome the steps that are being taken to increase nuclear safety. We continue to be alarmed by the increased risk of nuclear war that accompanies proliferation. The Maldives is a staunch supporter of non-proliferation. We firmly believe that the world will be a safer place without nuclear weapons. We hope that the Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons (NPT) review process will find ways to achieve progress in all aspects of the non-proliferation regime.

The continuation of many conflicts and the flaring up of others call into question the efficacy of this Organization. It is not only the passage of time that demands the reform and restructuring of the United Nations. The most persuasive argument is the urgent need to increase the ability of the United Nations to realize the objectives for which it has been set up. Whatever reform is undertaken should be instrumental in that sense. Reform must enhance its legitimacy. Reform must make the United Nations more democratic and

transparent, and it must also reinforce the United Nations ability to uphold equality among nations.

As we step into the new century, the world has reached a major turning point. We are bidding farewell to one millennium and are marching with determination into a new one. It is one in which a stronger commitment to multilateralism will be essential. Many of the hazards that we are faced with do not recognize national borders. The world has become closely integrated, and communities have become highly interwoven across national frontiers, necessitating global approaches to global problems. Advances in science and technology give us cause for optimism in our efforts to overcome several of the challenges that confront us today. These are assisted by new mindsets of cooperation and emotional intelligence. We need to nurture the positive strands and prune the negative. Yet the new century will not usher in a new age unless hope and progress become universal.

The new millennium will not set an enlightened course for world politics until right can triumph over might and double standards give way to justice for all. That is the millennium challenge.

The Acting President: We have heard the last speaker in the general debate.

I shall now call on those representatives who wish to speak in exercise of the right of reply.

May I remind members that statements in exercise of the right of reply are limited to 10 minutes for the first intervention and to five minutes for the second intervention and should be made by delegations from their seats.

Mr. Akinsanya (Nigeria): The Nigerian delegation listened attentively to the comments made by our brother, the Minister for Foreign Affairs of Cameroon, regarding their maritime border dispute with Nigeria.

Very often silence can be mistaken for acquiescence, hence this response. We are surprised indeed that the matter, which is currently before the International Court of Justice and should therefore be regarded as *sub judice*, has nonetheless been raised in this forum.

As a respectable member of the international community, Nigeria continues to explore and pursue peace and the amicable settlement of disputes. This is consistent with our track record in our subregion as well as elsewhere in the world, a record which many delegations have warmly acknowledged, even in the course of this session.

Nigeria maintains, and will continue to maintain, excellent relations with all nations, starting with those in our subregion and our neighbours, including the Republic of Cameroon. Nigeria does not have any territorial ambition against any country. It is for these reasons that we refuse to be drawn into unnecessary altercations with Cameroon, especially as we are confident that justice will prevail in time.

Nigeria, like any other sovereign nation, reserves the right to deploy its armed forces on its own territory in order to protect and secure its borders, so the question of withdrawing such forces should therefore not arise.

The other issues raised by the Foreign Minister of Cameroon are matters which are being determined through judicial processes. They therefore do not warrant a response from us in this forum.

Finally, let me state that Nigeria is firmly committed to the pursuit of peaceful and amicable solutions to disputes.

Mr. Ileka (Democratic Republic of the Congo) (*spoke in French*): Once again today the representatives of Rwanda and of Burundi have been talking nonsense and telling unspeakable lies about the dreadful role their countries are playing through their senseless and unjust invasion of the Democratic Republic of the Congo. Their statements do not merit any comment by my delegation. Furthermore, all they are doing is distracting the attention and insulting the intelligence of the members of the Assembly.

My delegation recalls that Mr. Yerodia Abdoulaye Ndombasi, our Minister for Foreign Affairs and International Cooperation and head of our delegation during this session of the Assembly, has already explained, clearly and eloquently, the tragic situation in my country now. However, my delegation had hoped that the delegation of Rwanda in particular had come before us today with a message of peace. Not at all: on the contrary, only a few hours ago, Rwandan troops again launched a major offensive against Kabinda, a town about 180 kilometres south-east of the diamond town of Mbuji-Mayi. This is the umpteenth violation of the Ceasefire Agreement signed in Lusaka by all the parties, it is intolerable and it is absolutely unacceptable.

(*spoke in English*)

Let us be very, very clear. What do the Congolese people want? We want the Rwandans — all of them — out of the Congo. We want the Ugandans out of the Congo. We want the Burundians out of the Congo. That is the bottom line. We invite all of them, along with their non-invited military forces, to return peacefully to their respective countries, using the same paths and roads that they took when they invaded the Democratic Republic of the Congo.

(*spoke in French*)

The rest is literature, the rest is history, a tragic history, written in blood and engraved with the suffering of innocent Congolese victims, who are paying heavily for the irredentist aims of the aggressors — veritable modern-day Attilas. Our Government and people are determined to defend every last inch, and every last parcel of its land — even if it means making the supreme sacrifice — to preserve our independence and sovereignty.

My Government once again calls on the Southern African Development Community, the Organization of African Unity and the United Nations urgently to make every possible effort to find, as soon as possible, a peaceful and lasting solution for the whole of the Great Lakes region. If this explosive situation is not given the attention that it continues to need, the international community, through its silence and timid response, which is unequal to the seriousness of the violations of international law taking place on the ground, will have on its conscience the responsibility for the imminent humanitarian catastrophe. My country, the Democratic Republic of the Congo, continues and will continue to sound the alarm so that the international community is kept abreast of events and actually shoulders all its responsibilities.

Mr. Mwandembwa (United Republic of Tanzania): In its earlier statement, the Republic of Burundi alleged that Tanzania harbours rebels from Burundi, or Burundi rebel bases, in its territory. I would like to put the record straight by stating categorically that the Government of the United Republic of Tanzania has never had, and does not now have, any Burundi rebel bases inside its territory. Tanzania has a lot of refugee camps. Tanzania also admits that it has been receiving a lot of refugees from the Republic of Burundi, and we have placed the refugees in those camps. But the camps cannot be regarded as rebel bases, because they are under the supervision of the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, which can confirm that they are not being used by Burundi rebels as bases.

Mr. Kouomegni (Cameroon) (*spoke in French*): As I stated a little while ago, Cameroon believes that the positive winds of change blowing at present through the institutions of Nigeria with the advent of a democratically elected Government have greatly raised the hopes of many people, including the people of Cameroon, who are especially hopeful for a peaceful resolution of crisis we face on our borders on land and sea.

However, the delegation of Cameroon is duty-bound to inform the General Assembly and the United Nations about a number of worrying facts. Since I have been here in the General Assembly Hall, my Government has informed me about incidents that have taken place on our common border, incidents initiated by the armed forces of Nigeria. I was to sign a note verbale of protest stating the various points where the incidents took place.

I should like to add that the Government of Nigeria which, like Cameroon, had accepted the binding jurisdiction of the International Court of Justice at The Hague, has just stated that it has reservations regarding that acceptance. This means, to put it in clear, that if we have a specific dispute with Nigeria, particularly about issues relating to the other parts of our border that are still causing difficulties, we will not be able to bring it before the International Court of Justice. And that means that if we have other conflicts, force may be the only way to find a solution.

Furthermore, we continue to note that some high-ranking leaders in Nigeria — not necessarily the highest — are giving interviews, talking to the press and letting it be known that, whatever the International Court of Justice may decide, there is no way that the territory of Bakassi, which is part of Cameroon, is going to be given back.

So there are some very worrying facts, but we are saying that there is a good wind blowing in Nigeria. Nigeria is returning normally to the international scene. However, we believe that in doing so Nigeria should respect the principles and norms of the international society to which it is returning.

Mr. Mutaboba (Rwanda): In keeping with the letter and the spirit of the Lusaka Agreement, my delegation will not waste the precious time of the General Assembly

by responding once more to the baseless allegations and lucubrations of the delegation of the Democratic Republic of the Congo. I wish therefore to invite Member States to refer to the facts contained in my delegation's previous statement, when we spoke in exercise of the right of reply on 29 September 1999 following the deplorable speech by the delegation of the Democratic Republic of the Congo.

The President returned to the Chair.

I would like in conclusion to refer to what my Minister spoke of earlier regarding the incident mentioned by the representative of the Democratic Republic of the Congo. I do not know where that representative got this from, but he did not get the record straight. If he had been able to follow the news from international sources, he would know that it was indeed Democratic Republic of the Congo troops and their allies who earlier launched the attack. We have already started to write a letter to the Security Council to denounce this breach of the ceasefire. I am pleased to say that the international community has so far responded to the declaration of that ceasefire by saying, "Please go ahead; we need peace, not just for the Congo but for the whole region and for the world".

Mr. Ileka (Democratic Republic of the Congo) (*spoke in French*): I apologize for taking the floor once more at this late stage in the debate, and I shall be very brief. My delegation wishes first to tell our compatriot, the representative of Rwanda, that we are pleased to note that he acknowledges the presence of Rwandan troops in Kabinda, that is 2,000 kilometres from the border between the Democratic Republic of the Congo and Rwanda. That said, my delegation affirms that we fully stand by our earlier statement in exercise of the right of reply.

Mr. Ntahomvunkiye (Burundi) (*spoke in French*): In response to the statement by the representative of the Democratic Republic of the Congo, I want to affirm my country's position, which has been fully explained in all forums ever since the outbreak of war in the Democratic Republic of the Congo, notably during the numerous meetings held at Lusaka. I note that, following those discussions Burundi was not identified as a belligerent party. Mediators, observers and special envoys were present at those meetings. And for the same reasons, which I set out earlier in my statement in the general debate, Burundi was not identified as an aggressor against the Democratic Republic of the Congo. Having stated its security concerns about its common border with the Congo following the upheaval caused by the war and the presence of armed bands known as the Front for the Defence of Democracy (FDD), my country has been and, I hope, will continue to be invited to all talks aimed at bringing peace.

Statement by the President

The President: We have listened to many world leaders and heads of delegation reflecting on the state of the world and sharing with us their views on the progress made by the international community over the past 54 years. The clarion call from delegations, shared by almost all speakers, was the need to create a world of peace, security and the development of humankind.

I would now like to express a few thoughts on some issues emanating from the two weeks of the general debate. Most speakers addressed various aspects of globalization. There is a clear consensus on the need to ensure that the benefits of globalization — resources, global markets, global technology and global ideas — are shared equitably among nations and among peoples. Many speakers expressed the view that developing countries, for the most part, were too weak to take full advantage of the new opportunities, and that they often ran the risk of increasing marginalization. They argued that in order for those States to benefit from globalization, the multilateral system should be strengthened, including support for the United Nations and its work for global peace, human security, prosperity and sustainable development.

Poverty was identified by many delegations as the root cause of some of the world's problems such as political conflicts, degradation of the environment, violence and crime. Many delegations singled out the debt burden as a major contributing factor to the untold suffering of women, children and the elderly in developing countries. Most representatives agreed that the eradication of poverty and the fulfilment of people's aspirations for development require genuine international solidarity and mutually beneficial arrangements and cooperation between the developed and the developing countries.

Most delegations drew attention to the international financial and monetary system. Some stressed its qualities and argued in favour of keeping it as it is; others felt strongly about its shortcomings, and proposed that it was necessary to enhance the process of reforming the Bretton Woods institutions. Still others argued that the system could not be reformed and that it should be scrapped altogether and replaced with a new, just, open system.

Clearly, the debate on this matter will continue in the weeks and months ahead, not least during the millennium summit.

I turn to the subject of conflict situations. Regional wars and other armed conflicts featured prominently in virtually all statements in the general debate. All speakers acknowledged the destructive nature of wars and armed conflict and agreed to further strengthen the international and regional systems of collective security. They further encouraged the idea of dialogue and negotiations as a means to resolve differences.

On the notion of humanitarian intervention, there were speakers who observed that respect for human rights had become more important than the sovereignty of States. Against this background, it was argued that the international community should intervene in the face of gross and systematic violations of human rights, with or without prior approval of the United Nations, particularly the Security Council.

Other Member States expressed the view that the new notion of humanitarian intervention had the potential of destroying the United Nations Charter, undermining the sovereignty of States and overthrowing legitimate Governments. They stressed that the protection of human rights was an obligation incumbent on all Governments within the context of the exercise of their sovereignty and constitutional order.

Still other delegations, recalling the spirit of the Charter of the world body, emphasized that nations could not intervene in the internal affairs of others without a specific Security Council mandate. They observed that any massive violations of human rights leading to humanitarian emergencies required the coordinated action of the international community through the United Nations, and not by a fiat of unilateral action and creation of faits accomplis that would set bad precedents.

Most delegates were of the opinion that the subject of humanitarian intervention needed to be discussed in depth during the current session of the General Assembly — for example, during the consideration of the report of the Secretary-General.

Most delegations agreed on the need for general and complete disarmament. Other speakers called for strict adherence to implementation of the existing international instruments concerning disarmament. There was also a renewed call for nuclear disarmament, the elimination of weapons of mass destruction and effective control of the proliferation of small arms.

On reform of the Security Council, judging from the pronouncements of delegations on the reform, restructuring and democratization of the United Nations, there is a strong consensus among many States in favour of further strengthening the Security Council through its enlargement and making it more effective and representative and more responsive to the challenges facing the world now and in the next millennium.

Many speakers noted that reform of the United Nations was a prerequisite for the Organization's continued existence and efficacy in the twenty-first century. Others maintained that the manner in which the Organization dealt with issues such as the eradication of poverty, regional conflicts, consolidation of the rule of law, human rights, democratic governance and a fair international economic order would define its role in the next millennium. In addition, there was a clear call for new forms of cooperation between the United Nations and the regional organizations to advance the cause of peace, justice and development around the world.

Regarding the financial situation of the United Nations, there was a clear consensus on the obligation of all Member States to pay their assessed contributions in full, on time and without preconditions. Emphasis was placed on the fact that the United Nations cannot perform effectively without funds, resources and competent personnel.

Virtually all delegations addressed the plight of children, especially the phenomenon of child soldiers. There is a growing commitment that international instruments be elaborated to outlaw the use of children under the age of 18 in armed conflict, thereby contributing to protecting future generations from the scourge of war.

Virtually all delegations also referred to, and expressed grave concern about, the alarming HIV/AIDS pandemic. They underscored the importance of enhanced global cooperation in fighting this dreaded killer disease, which has declared war against humanity.

I should like to express my gratitude to those speakers who cooperated in ensuring time management by observing the 20-minute voluntary guideline established by the General Assembly. The average time for all speakers was 23 minutes. When many delegations

routinely ignore the 20-minute voluntary time limit, this results in the disruption of the scheduling of appointments of heads of State or Government, foreign and other ministers, and the time allocated for other speakers. In future general debates, it would be appreciated if delegations would continue adhering scrupulously to the earlier decision of the General Assembly in this regard.

I also express my gratitude to the Under-Secretary-General, Mr. Yongjian Jin, and his able assistants as well as the Secretariat staff for their outstanding devotion to duty and professionalism.

It should be the business of this session of the General Assembly to endeavour to find solutions to the questions raised during the general debate. As we begin considering the remaining substantive items of our agenda, both in the plenary and in Main Committees, I trust that we will bring to bear on the debate the concerns, hopes and aspirations expressed by all delegations over the past two weeks.

May I take it that it is the wish of the General Assembly to conclude its consideration of agenda item 9?

It was so decided.

Programme of work

The President: I should like to make an announcement concerning the programme of work of the General Assembly.

I should like to draw the attention of the General Assembly to document A/INF/54/3/Add.1, which covers the period from 4 October through 30 November and which has been distributed to delegations this morning. The attention of members is drawn in particular to the change in the schedule for the consideration of agenda item 11, entitled "Report of the Security Council". Instead of being taken up on Tuesday, 21 October, agenda item 11 will now be taken up on Wednesday, 20 October. The lists of speakers for the items mentioned in document A/INF/54/3/Add.1 are now open.

The meeting rose at 3.10 p.m.

United Nations A/54/PV.23

General Assembly

Official Records

Fifty-fourth session

23rd plenary meeting
Monday, 4 October 1999, 10 a.m.
New York

President: Mr. Gurirab ..... (Namibia)

The meeting was called to order at 10.15 a.m.

Agenda item 106

Social development, including questions relating to the world social situation and to youth, ageing, disabled persons and the family: follow-up to the International Year of Older Persons

Report of the Secretary-General (A/54/268)

Draft resolution (A/54/L.6)

The President: Members will recall that the Assembly, pursuant to resolution 52/80 of 12 December 1997, decided at its 3rd plenary meeting on 17 September 1999 to devote four plenary meetings on Monday and Tuesday, 4 and 5 October 1999, to the follow-up to the International Year of Older Persons. I welcome to the United Nations those of you who have come to this important meeting from different parts of the world, and I wish you all a pleasant stay in New York.

The theme of the International Year of Older Persons, "A society for all ages", is founded on the basic idea of inclusiveness, which should inform the human relations, family cohesion and social development that strengthen the society. In this sense, the theme of ageing links us to an early period of the evolution of society and community interdependence when older persons were revered for their wisdom and as repositories of traditions, customs and past achievements. This is, indeed, a welcome sign of a return to our roots and humanity.

For these reasons, the presence in this Hall of so many senior Government representatives and other elderly and esteemed participants coming from their capitals demonstrates the importance which Member States attach to the issue of ageing of persons and populations.

Questions relating to ageing have been on the United Nations agenda since as far back as 1948. The noble ideals and objectives enshrined in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights enjoin us to strive towards creating and maintaining human societies based on family values of loving and caring among all members of the family. Elders, parents, youth and children are all linked together through reciprocal relationships which continuously enrich their common heritage.

It was not, however, until the adoption of the International Plan of Action on Ageing by the World Assembly on Ageing, held in Vienna in 1982, that States and civil society started adopting public policy and other concrete measures to deal with ageing. This Plan of Action is now the central policy document of United Nations discussions and activities on ageing.

The United Nations General Assembly has taken significant steps since the World Assembly on Ageing to underscore the importance which Member States attach to the issue of ageing. These steps include: the designation, in 1990, of 1 October as the International Day of Older Persons; the adoption, in 1991, of the United Nations Principles for Older Persons; and, in

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1992, the agreement on the global targets on ageing for the year 2001. In addition, in 1992, the General Assembly proclaimed 1999 as the International Year of Older Persons.

In the 1992 Proclamation on Ageing, the Assembly urged the international community to give generous support to national initiatives on ageing, consistent with national cultures and social conditions in relevant countries. Thus it is encouraging to see that in the course of this year, focal points have been established in more than 100 Member States. This clearly indicates that more and more nations are recognizing a significant increase in the population of their older citizens, who are now living longer. Perhaps more importantly, there is growing awareness of the extraordinary speed with which these numbers will grow in the years to come, sooner rather than later. These facts, I believe, have major implications for our thinking, attitudes and commitment and the public policy of nations.

The Secretary-General points out in his report entitled "International Year of Older Persons, 1999: activities and legacies" that legislative initiatives have been undertaken or reinforced and strategies to deal with ageing put in place by some Member States. While these efforts are forward looking, more concrete actions need to be taken.

The central theme of the International Year of Older Persons has drawn its inspiration from the World Summit for Social Development, held in March 1995 in Copenhagen. Since the Year's theme was first introduced in the Secretary-General's report of 1995 (A/50/114), its core ideas have been developed to the point where it is now possible to suggest a model for the development of a policy framework on ageing. This model aims to present a new view and a new way of assessing ageing of individuals and populations in a more holistic way. Surely, this is the best approach.

I am confident that over the next two days the debate will be characterized by new ideas and a renewed commitment to the Proclamation on Ageing, which calls for the recognition of humanity's demographic coming of age and the promise it holds for maturing attitudes and innovations in political, legal, social, economic, cultural and spiritual fields as our collective and determined way of preparing ourselves towards social justice, global peace, human development equality in the next century. "A society for all ages" is a solemn exhortation directed at us all for an enlightened and goal-oriented debate on the challenges and opportunities that it conveys.

I now call on the Deputy Secretary-General.

The Deputy Secretary-General: I am very happy to be with you today as you gather to discuss the follow-up to the International Year of Older Persons. When he launched this International Year last October, the Secretary-General said we were in the midst of a silent revolution. I am pleased to say that the silence has been broken.

Throughout the Year, 99 national committees and innumerable other actors from all sectors — Governments, non-governmental organizations, academic institutions and the corporate world, not to mention the United Nations family — convened conferences, organized campaigns, launched studies, held cultural events and created Internet pages, all in pursuit of one goal: highlighting the issue of ageing and raising awareness of the implications of the demographic revolution for individuals and societies all over the world. I would say that together they have done excellent work.

Although it was not news to anyone that our societies are ageing, it was necessary to put some basic facts into sharper focus. Globally, 1 out of every 10 persons is age 60 or over. By 2020, the corresponding figure will be one out of every eight persons, and by 2150, every third person will be over 60.

Although statistics are often said to hide more than they reveal, these are, by any standards, startling numbers. They show beyond any doubt that, even if all other things remain equal, families, communities and societies will be dramatically different a century from now. And since we don't know very much else about what tomorrow's world will look like, it would indeed be foolish not to prepare for one of the transformations we do know we will have to face.

Another important fact the Year has brought to light is that although Europe is projected to remain the major area of the world affected by ageing, future changes will be more dramatic in the less developed countries. Moreover, these regions will be facing the ageing factor at the same time as they face a large increase in their total population, as well as the ongoing challenge of development. So their strategies will have to be tailored accordingly. When it comes to ageing policies, one size does not fit all.

Developed countries will mainly have to address the special needs of the growing number of very old people

in their populations and to examine the appropriateness of current retirement policies and practices, income security provisions and pension schemes. Less developed countries will have to focus more on the link between ageing and development: the eradication of poverty in older populations, support for families, health care, and human and institutional capacities to address the needs of older people.

The Year also helped put the ageing revolution in a more positive perspective. Extending life expectancy is, we have been reminded, something humanity has always striven for; achieving it is truly one of the greatest successes of this century. With it naturally comes the ageing of societies. Like all structural changes, this poses a challenge. As long as we do not cling to outdated ideas and habits, this challenge can be a great opportunity.

Of course, this will only be possible if the older generations participate fully in the life of their communities and countries. They have to be given the means to do so. As the International Plan of Action on Ageing said as long ago as 1982, in paragraph 32:

> "the transition to a positive, active and developmentally oriented view of aging may well result from action by elderly people themselves, through the sheer force of their growing number and influence."

This is an appealing idea. But we should not take it to indicate that everything will just fall into place once there are enough older people around. A lot of planning can be done, and must be done, for ageing to become a positive force.

(spoke in French)

The International Year has helped us to become aware of the fact that, throughout the twentieth century policies concerning older persons were drawn up in the context of young societies. Henceforth, it is with ageing societies in mind that we need to tailor our policies, that we need to formulate all our policies, including those concerning other age groups.

Having collectively realized our dream of a longer life expectancy, we now need to adapt to it. On the level of policies, infrastructures and distribution of resources, Governments will need to seek the means to meet varying aspirations and needs.

Financial security and the health of older persons naturally remain a key concern. Our thinking should go much further, however, to include questions such as continued training, the promotion of healthy life styles from early in life, extended families, relations between generations, the status of women, labour policies and the link between ageing and socio-economic development. In all these spheres, investments made today will avoid considerable imbalances and dependencies later on, both for the individual and for ageing societies. I would go further: if these policies are carefully thought out, they will allow for the transformation of what could otherwise become a burden into a valuable source of human, social and economic capital.

Well thought out investments assume concerted and planned action, rather than timely intervention. The question of ageing, with its numerous and extremely complex ramifications, has to be examined in the broadest context possible. In other words, the way to confront it seriously is to make it an integral part of all economic and social development programmes, whether local, national or international.

The United Nations, for its part, is determined to play its part so that the International Year may continue to bear fruit. As the Assembly knows, we have launched long-term initiatives, such as the Research Agenda on Ageing for the Twenty-first Century and a data bank on national policies and programmes, accessible on the Internet. I invite all States Members to actively support these projects and benefit from them. And I thank all those who have already made a generous financial contribution.

The International Year of Older Persons is not an end in itself, but a springboard. Like all springboards, it can change a resolute impulse into a great leap forward. It can give us the necessary impetus to create a richer and more mature society in the next century, relying on the participation of each individual and meeting the needs of all its members, no matter what their age. Let us not lose this opportunity.

I wish the Assembly success in its work.

The President: Before calling on the first speaker on the list, I should like to recall that a note verbale dated 3 September 1999 was transmitted to permanent missions, with the suggestion that statements at these four plenary meetings should not exceed 10 minutes.

In view of the large number of speakers on the list, it would be appreciated if speakers adhered to the 10-minute guideline.

Ms. Perho (Finland): I have the honour to speak on behalf of the European Union. The Central and Eastern European countries associated with the Union — Bulgaria, the Czech Republic, Estonia, Hungary, Latvia, Lithuania, Poland, Romania, Slovakia and Slovenia — and the associated countries, Cyprus and Malta, as well as the European Free Trade Association (EFTA) country, member of the European Economic Area (EEA), Liechtenstein, have expressed their wish to align themselves with this statement.

The International Year of Older Persons is soon coming to its end. However, the end of the Year should be seen also as a start, and as an opportunity to carry forward the legacy of the Year. As the Secretary-General so rightly states in his report (A/54/268), the activities of the Year, organized all over the world, have brought to the Year a global relevance that will sustain and move "A society for all ages" into the new millennium.

Older persons have a crucial role to play in the development process: they should be seen as active participants at all levels and in all activities of societies, not as dependants. The objective of any policy on ageing should be to promote older persons' well-being and their ability to cope as independently as possible, and to improve and promote the care they receive. Equality, the right to self-determination, economic independence and security are fundamental values underlying such a policy. A holistic, multi-sectoral policy on ageing must encompass all the central dimensions of life in society: working life and livelihood; health and functional capacity; the home and the everyday environment; education and culture; social welfare and health care; and social interaction and participation. Policies on ageing should also foster dialogue and solidarity between generations.

Globally, population ageing is a common phenomenon. Its impact on society, however, must be seen as closely linked to country- or region-specific situations where economic, social, cultural and other factors may vary greatly. The pace of growth in the number of older persons is faster than anticipated, posing new challenges to societies all over the world.

The European Union earlier this year released a communication entitled "Towards a Europe for All Ages — Promoting Prosperity and Intergenerational Solidarity". This communication, from the Commission of the European Communities, was seen as necessary mainly because of the rapid changes in population structures in the European Union countries, one manifestation of which is increasing life expectancy.

Increasing life expectancy is a result of successful social and health policies and improved overall living standards and general well-being. However, in ageing societies such as those in Europe one of the concerns is how national economies will be able to meet the challenge of growing pensions costs. There are various reform initiatives under discussion which aim to prolong active participation by the ageing population in working life. There is also a need to identify new forms of labour that would take ageing workers' needs into account: these new forms include such measures as developing various part-time work or part-time retirement schemes.

The majority of today's retiring people are healthy and active citizens who do not need any targeted social services for older persons. The researchers describe this phenomenon as "the third age" — following childhood/youth and active working life — the age when an individual is still healthy, active and financially independent.

In Europe the number of people in the oldest age bracket, 80 and above, is growing. Many European countries face the challenge of meeting the needs of this population group. Even for this age group, the objective is to design policies and services that enable them to live lives that are as independent as possible. Their daily physical and mental environment should be "older people friendly", and they should have access to social and health care services that meet their needs. The importance of these factors as they affect older people's lives was of course set out in the 1982 Vienna International Plan of Action on Ageing.

The policy on ageing in my own country follows very much those lines. Finland is among those European Union countries whose population is ageing fastest. Our policy on ageing has been mostly Government and municipal policy, with clear emphasis on social welfare and health policy. To an increasing degree, however, weight is being given to the importance of civil society, including non-governmental organizations and private-sector actors. Our objective is an active old age, giving older people equal right to participate and to learn.

The human rights of older people require special attention. The issue of ageing women is part of the general issue of the advancement of women and cannot be dealt with in isolation. Older women make a significant contribution to development; policies and strategies must be designed that support their active participation and guarantee them equal rights in any society. In Europe, according to a recent report from the European Commission entitled "Equal Opportunities for Women and Men in the European Union 1998", the ageing of Europe is the ageing of older women.

The States Members of the United Nations report every four years to the Organization on issues of ageing. There have been, however, some problems with this reporting, such as a lack of responses from Governments. This has resulted in a very narrow picture of the circumstances and life situations of older people across the world. One difficulty with the reporting has probably been that the challenges relating to ageing and old age are very different in different parts of the world.

Good practices and working methods are very specific to national and local situations: it has not been possible to transfer them in their entirety to different contexts. We welcome the establishment by the United Nations of an Internet-accessible database on ageing that will make it possible to exchange information and good practices which will provide us with a wider global picture. The usefulness of this database will depend largely on the input from Governments.

At all levels, including local, national and international, long-term strategic work is necessary. Since population ageing as a global phenomenon will have a very strong impact on social development, we will have to mainstream ageing-related issues in our social and economic policies at all levels — including at the United Nations.

The European Union considers the 1982 International Plan of Action on Ageing a milestone in United Nations policy on ageing. There is, however, an obvious need to revise it to make it correspond to the needs of today. The European Union would address this need by supporting the idea of developing a new long-term strategy on ageing. This should be based on the experience gained within the implementation of the 1982 Plan. This kind of approach would also make it possible to review and reform the present reporting system in a way that would better serve the Member States and the international community.

The European Union believes that the holding of a global meeting in the year 2002 to review the outcome of the first World Assembly on Ageing — particularly the interrelationship between ageing and development — would contribute to the formulation of a new strategy on ageing, while maintaining the momentum created during the International Year of Older Persons.

To conclude, I would like to thank the Secretary-General for his efforts to bring these issues to the global agenda during the International Year of Older Persons. Our sincere thanks also go to the Chairpersons of the Consultative Group for the International Year of Older Persons, Ambassador Julia Alvarez and Counsellor Aurelio Fernández.

Mr. Francese (Italy): My delegation feels very privileged, Mr. President, to take part in this morning's debate on the issue of the International Year of Older Persons and its follow-up under your wise and effective guidance.

Italy feels that we all owe a great debt of gratitude to the United Nations for its efforts on behalf of older persons. Over the past decade or so, the Organization has defined the United Nations Principles for Older Persons, produced the Vienna International Plan of Action on Ageing, and proclaimed the special Year as a way of focusing attention on the theme "Towards a society for all ages". Making 1999 the occasion for international attention to older persons in the name of greater justice and solidarity is a fitting way to close the millennium.

Ageing is an issue of vital importance to the social policies of Italy, a nation that has one of the oldest populations in Europe and the world. In fact, our National Statistics Institute has forecast that by 2040 the percentage of the population that is over the age of 60 years will have increased by 39 per cent, and the percentage of those over 80 years of age by 9.3 per cent.

In addressing the issue of ageing, we must pay heed to a number of principles fundamental to the lives of older persons: independence, participation in society, provision of care, education and, finally, dignity. To implement them we need long-term strategies to recognize, appreciate and value older persons and their role in society. Italy has accepted this difficult challenge with determination and vigour.

For instance, in the Preparatory Commission of the International Criminal Court, Italy has drafted a proposal

to safeguard the older person. This is just one example of how raising matters in a number of international bodies can help to raise the standing of our senior citizens.

"Growing old well, growing old together" was the theme of the Italian Government's planning and allocation of resources on the occasion of the celebration of the International Year of Older Persons. The Italian people as a whole were mobilized through the National Committee for the Celebration of the International Year, expressly created and chaired by our Minister for Social Solidarity, The Honourable Livia Turco, who had originally planned to be here with us today but who was kept behind in Rome by a sudden parliamentary emergency. The Committee's members include representatives of several Government ministries, local and regional authorities and non-governmental organizations.

The national media helped launch an information campaign using advertising spots and television programmes on older persons in which various personalities participated. United Nations documentation on ageing was widely distributed, thanks to intense publication activity. In the spirit of article 13 of the Amsterdam Treaty, a petition was circulated to amend article 3 of the Italian Constitution by introducing a clause to outlaw any form, direct or indirect, of age discrimination.

To raise public awareness of the issues of ageing and at the same time to listen to the emerging needs of civil society, the National Committee has sponsored initiatives throughout the country intended to leave a lasting effect in the coming years and decades. One major step was the conference entitled "Close-up on Old Age", held in Rome in May this year. The speakers included top leaders of the country, beginning with the Prime Minister, The Honourable Massimo D'Alema, who emphasized the Government's commitment to older persons. The purpose of the conference was twofold.

The first purpose was to announce the presentation to the Government of a draft law for the establishment and organization of a volunteer civilian service of older persons. This service would promote participatory, cooperative and responsible citizenship, while underscoring the many qualities that older persons have to offer after a lifetime of experience.

The second purpose was to receive contributions that would help lead to approval of the law on reforming the welfare system, currently being discussed in Parliament, aimed at creating an integrated system of actions and social services focusing on older persons. The reform is based on the fundamental notion that the older person must be considered a legal subject, and stresses the need to provide new, added economic subsidies to families living with older members. A key point of the reform is the need to expand social services to include better home services for older persons who are not self-sufficient.

The National Committee has further sponsored activities by local and regional authorities, associations and labour organizations. A number of conferences and seminars were held throughout the country to increase awareness of a fundamental need of contemporary society, that of creating a new generation of older persons that rejects a reductive view of old age as a state of medical dependence. The main issues they addressed include adult education, legal and social security, integrated systems of welfare and health actions and services, with a focus on Alzheimer's patients — some half a million persons in Italy are afflicted in old age by this illness — active ageing, empowerment, ageing and gender, and social security. Strong emphasis was placed on inter-generational solidarity through various projects aimed at promoting dialogue with young people. These lectures were accompanied by cultural and social events, in which many volunteer associations of older people participated.

One of the Committee's most noteworthy steps was its adoption and endorsement of the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization Declaration of the Responsibilities of Present Generations Towards Future Generations. Among the activities promoted by local and regional authorities, labour unions and non-governmental organizations were international and national conferences on the issues associated with ageing, ranging from broad cultural and social debates to more focused discussions of the specific economic, medical and psychological concerns of the elderly.

The Committee will wrap up its activities at the end of this celebratory Year with a "Show of Good Practices", an event involving 8,000 Italian municipalities. The Show, to be held in Catania next February, will aim to spread knowledge of activities to benefit older persons being carried out at the local level. It will also seek to prod our culture towards developing a social system that encourages the active citizenship of older persons, assures their well-being and provides support for persons with reduced independence. This is the kind of activity we have to carry out in coming years

so that our national policies aimed at enriching the lives of our senior citizens are made more and more effective.

In this spirit, Italy has sought to do its part to promote unity among different persons and institutions, restore meaning to the end of the millennium in this area and express solidarity with older people in Italy and throughout the world in this celebratory Year and beyond.

Ms. Bergmann (Germany): The current year has been declared the International Year of Older Persons. It is dedicated to the concerns of a special group within our population, older persons. However, the theme, "Towards a society for all ages", clearly demonstrates the need for all members of society to become involved.

In Germany, we have endeavoured to pursue concrete goals where possible — goals which are in close contact with the real circumstances in which people live. These include fostering citizens' social commitment and involvement as well as voluntary social work on the part of senior citizens; promoting quality assurance in assistance and care for older persons; strengthening the existing potential for solidarity among young and old alike; and promoting dialogue with politicians.

If we were to attempt a preliminary evaluation today, it would become clear that the conferences which have already been held and the projects and campaigns conducted, as well as the International Year, have been successful and have managed to draw the public's attention to this pressing topic. While the International Year of Older Persons has thus contributed to raising national and international awareness about population ageing, a society for all ages will require concrete steps. If we are to set the course for the societies and senior citizens of tomorrow and beyond, we need a new impetus and impulses which will take us beyond 1999 into the next millennium.

Let us recall once again the historic international conference on Ageing, held in Vienna in 1982, which adopted the International Plan of Action on Ageing. Its aim was to support Member States in formulating their national policies and programmes. One central message of the Plan of Action on Ageing was that older men and women should be enabled to make as comprehensive a contribution as possible to society.

A great deal has been achieved since then. The Vienna Plan of Action contributed, for example, to an increase in the attention given to the opportunities and challenges posed by ageing and related issues in many parts of the world. However, since the International Plan of Action on Ageing reflects the political, social and economic situation of 20 years past, the time has come to make a renewed effort to build on the achievements of the past and take account of the challenges now before us.

The demographic changes which have been occurring for a number of years now, not only in all of the countries of Europe but worldwide, have begun to dramatically change the landscape of our societies and urgently demand action by all responsible decision-makers.

In the Federal Republic of Germany, for instance, the proportion of those over the age of 60 will be twice that of those under the age of 15 in 30 years' time. Today, with the exception of Japan, the 25 countries with the highest proportion of citizens over the age of 65 are located in Europe. By the year 2030, the European Union will have to reckon with over 100 million senior citizens, of which some 20 million will be 80 and older.

At the same time, the ageing of populations has spread well beyond the industrialized world. The current growth rate of the elderly population in the developing countries is more than double that in developed countries. Percentages by themselves do not always give a sense of population ageing. In sub-Saharan Africa, between 1995 and 2015, the growth percentage-wise will be barely perceptible. The number of elderly people, however, will rise from 17 million to 29 million.

Lacking funds and unable to provide basic social services, developing countries struggle to come to terms with the growing numbers of elderly people. It has turned out to be a myth that families are always able to assume responsibility for the elderly. Being cared for by one's family often means sharing the family's poverty. The development process itself often causes stresses for families.

Productive ageing may in the end turn out to be a helpful concept for many countries. Moving ageing into the mainstream of national development agendas could be achieved by creating opportunities for older people to earn income while contributing to the growth of the economy. This requires a coordinated national effort and assistance from international governmental and non-governmental organizations. On the whole, more important than the quantitative changes are the qualitative

and structural changes which are connected with these demographic trends. These call for political action.

I therefore propose we now focus on the building of foundations for concrete policies and measures. The United Nations and all States have a key role to play to advance this global process, which aims to ensure that policymakers intervene wherever a new course can be set for the benefit of individuals in policies on health care, the labour market, education, cultural affairs and housing.

We at the United Nations should make a comprehensive attempt to adapt the nearly 20-year old Vienna International Plan of Action on Ageing to the changed conditions and adjust it to meet the challenges of the future. I propose that to this end, the General Assembly decide to take appropriate steps so that the Commission for Social Development can take up this project.

Expert seminars could provide the technical foundation for a revised text which could be submitted to the Commission for Social Development for further deliberations in the year 2001. The Commission on the Status of Women and the Commission on Population and Development should also be involved in this endeavour, because they can contribute expertise on the issues of older women and overall population policies.

In the year 2002, on the occasion of the twentieth anniversary of the Vienna Plan of Action, it should be our aim to honour the work done in the past two decades and to adopt a new, second International Plan of Action on Ageing. I am confident that this proposal will have the overall support of Member States and observers in the United Nations. The Federal Republic of Germany is prepared to grant financial support for the preparatory work needed to revise the International Plan of Action on Ageing.

In this context, I would also like to recall that the Vienna Plan of Action envisaged work at the regional level. Since regions have different characteristics in terms of population ageing, greater use ought to be made of this possibility in the future. As a concrete first step in this direction, I would like to inform the Assembly that Germany is willing to hold a ministerial conference for the Economic Commission for Europe (ECE) region in Berlin in 2002, provided, of course, that the ECE members approve that proposal.

In conclusion, I would like to take the opportunity to draw the attention of the Assembly to a very extraordinary person. Ambassador Julia Alvarez of the Dominican Republic has been a staunch advocate of the senior citizens of this world over the past two decades. Her countless initiatives and her untiring efforts are testimony to one person's shining example of what a single individual can achieve for society. Her contribution to the promotion of policies for older persons has been and continues to be of inestimable value.

Ms. Alvarez (Dominican Republic) (*spoke in Spanish*): The delegation of the Dominican Republic has the honour of addressing the General Assembly at its meeting dedicated to the follow-up to the International Year of Older Persons. Much has changed since the World Assembly on Ageing, which was held in Vienna in 1982, when it was first acknowledged in an important international forum that the ageing of the population was not confined to the industrialized world but was actually going to have its greatest impact in our developing countries.

Initially, that change came slowly. The World Assembly on Ageing itself produced an International Plan of Action on Ageing, which focused more on humanitarian issues more than on the consequences of ageing for development. The Trust Fund for Ageing, which in 1982 contained $1 million, quickly and quietly disappeared, and the Plan of Action languished and lost all validity as a productive working instrument for the future. At the international conferences devoted to other subjects, older people continued to be included among other vulnerable groups. Despite the fact that the concept of productive aging continued in theory to be the desired objective, in practice it was rarely made concrete through new and fruitful initiatives.

A decade later, however, we had at least begun to face our future. We proclaimed 1 October as the International Day of Older Persons; we adopted the United Nations Principles for Older Persons; and, of course, in 1992 we declared that 1999 would be the International Year of Older Persons, with the theme, "A society for all ages".

In view of the fact that in the past United Nations activities on ageing have often been characterized by a gap between intention and action and between proclamations and effective projects, it has been heartening to see this revival of an awareness of the significance of population aging and the potential social role that older people can play — a revival brought about

in particular by the International Year of Older Persons, which is now drawing to a close.

The report of the Secretary General entitled "International Year of Older Persons, 1999: activities and legacies" summarizes and highlights selected activities in observance of the Year. It also analyses the impact of the Year on the direction and substantive content of the United Nations programme on ageing. We would like briefly to highlight some of the activities and accomplishments of our country in preparing for and celebrating the Year.

First of all, in September 1998, the Congress of the Dominican Republic drafted and approved a Code of Rights for Older Persons and established a national commission to oversee its enforcement. Older persons were consulted before the drafting of the document through the non-governmental organizations belonging to the Network for the Dignity of the Elderly, which also mobilized public opinion in support of the Code. We believe that concerted effort to protect and defend the rights of older persons was our greatest contribution to the International Year of Older Persons.

The Dominican Republic also became the first developing nation to work on the issue of ageing together with a group of developed nations, joining the United States, France, Japan and the United Kingdom in the creation in 1998 of the International Longevity Centre in the Dominican Republic, with its headquarters in Santo Domingo. That Centre is carrying out various intercultural studies and joint projects.

We have also celebrated the Year by exhibiting works of art and publishing poetry produced by elderly people, and we have organized competitions asking school children to describe how they see themselves after the age of 60. Furthermore, we have developed a community health programme to make elderly people aware of the need to take care of their own health.

With regard to promoting the concept of productive ageing, the support of the media has been invaluable in eliminating stereotypes and creating a positive attitude to ageing. As a developing nation, we do not have the luxury of considering older persons merely as a drain on our limited resources. We do not have the means necessary to pull them into the twenty-first century, but with goodwill, imagination and an openness to social innovation, we hope to move forward with them into the new world of ageing.

The International Year of Older Persons has shed light on and celebrated one of the most dramatic developments of our time. Increased life expectancy is producing something new under the sun: an alteration in the basic character of the human population of the Earth. It will so profoundly alter society that we run the danger of being left with institutions that were designed to deal with a world that no longer exists.

The challenges and opportunities presented by this unprecedented and uncharted era in human history are only now beginning to take shape. We live in the era of ageing, but we are only at the dawn of that era.

Whether our societies can rise to the occasion is not yet clear. We speak often of increased life expectancy, but not yet enough about what we can expect from that increased life. We anticipate that ageing populations will drain our resources, yet society allows older people to be eclipsed as vital, contributing members of their communities. We obsess about population statistics without sufficiently considering what all the numbers that constitute those statistics add up to.

If we are to add life to the years that have been added to life, and if we are to marshal all our potential resources to deal intelligently with this new social order, we need to understand the shape and the size of what confronts us. With older people looming larger in the statistical profiles of most countries, what will be or could be the nature of intergenerational ties in the future? What does increased longevity mean to people of all ages? What is the significance of the feminization of ageing? How can we formulate political and social strategies to deal with ageing that could also be adapted to economies in various stages of development? Of what has been tried so far, what works best, and why does it work?

The International Year of Older Persons has highlighted the potential of older people themselves to play a leading role in meeting these demographic challenges. Older people must be allowed and encouraged to see themselves as actors in the drama of their own lives and in their societies. They must be enabled to participate in the functioning of those societies as active, productive members, not as people who are passive and needy — who at best arouse pity and at worst are viewed as a burden. All of us must be fully aware that ability, not chronology, is the measure of how much people can contribute to society.

Focusing attention on a group by proclaiming a year in its honour is always a bit of a risk. When the International Year of Older Persons ends, will these people be discarded like a 1999 calendar? By 31 December 1999, if we have the will and the foresight to create a society for all ages, we will have gone beyond the calendar, certain, and proud, of having put older people on the map.

We are determined that for older people this time will be their time, that the clock will not run out with the calendar. We must ensure that the efforts made during the Year will not end when the clock strikes twelve on 31 December 1999. We thus welcome the idea of the Government of Germany to host a regional ministerial conference on ageing under the aegis of the Economic Commission for Europe in 2002 as a way to encourage regional follow-up initiatives. We hope that this will be emulated by other countries and other regions.

Finally, we want to underline a proposal that we feel will play a fundamental role in our overall plans for the future. Indeed, the generous offer by the Government of Spain to host a second World Assembly on Ageing in 2002 deserves our heartfelt gratitude and our sincere commitment to cooperate as much as we can for the success of the 2002 World Assembly.

Mr. Insanally (Guyana): In commemorating the International Year of Older Persons in 1999, the last year of the twentieth century and indeed of the second millennium, we cannot fail to recognize the important contribution which older persons have made to shaping the present century and, indeed, to shaping our civilization from time immemorial.

On behalf of the Group of 77 and China, some 133 countries in all, I take this opportunity to salute and thank them for the legacy they have bestowed on our younger generation as they prepare to face the challenges of the future. The accumulated wealth of experience and knowledge of today's elderly will undoubtedly provide tomorrow's adults with a solid foundation on which to build their own lives.

In this context, let me say a word of praise to Ambassador Julia Tavares de Alvarez of the Dominican Republic, one of our own, who has done so much single-handedly to advocate the cause of older persons.

Developing countries have long recognized the significance of an ageing population for their national development. In most of our societies, the old are treated with honour and respect. No wonder, then, that in 1992, when the Proclamation on Ageing was adopted by consensus by the General Assembly as resolution 47/5, the sponsors of that resolution were, significantly, the developing countries. That resolution built upon the outcome of the World Assembly on Ageing held in 1982 and on the United Nations Principles for Older Persons, which were adopted in 1991. Along with the Secretary-General's global targets on ageing, the programme of action sought to integrate national and international plans into a unified campaign to deal with the "greying" of the world's population. The Group of 77 today remains firmly committed to this comprehensive and cooperative approach.

For, while the problems of ageing have been more associated with developed rather than developing countries, perhaps because of lower fertility rates and mortality rates in the former, it is merely a matter of time before they are common to both. As we have heard, statistics show that by 2005 more than 70 per cent of all persons 60 years old and over will live in developing countries. The obligation to provide them with employment opportunities, improved health care, education and other social benefits will not be easily satisfied. The Governments of these countries, faced as many of them are with heavy debt burdens and severe structural adjustment programmes, will find it difficult if not impossible to bear the costs of adequate social measures. Hopefully, in the forthcoming reviews of the World Summit for Social Development and of the Fourth World Conference on Women we will have further opportunities to develop international cooperation to satisfy the needs of the elderly, who, as we know, constitute one of the most vulnerable sectors of our societies.

The life-cycle approach to development has now gained wide international acceptance. The 1992 Proclamation on Ageing observed that preparations for old age should begin in childhood and continue throughout life for the entire population. Such an approach could serve to integrate the concerns of the elderly into national development strategies and plans. Special attention will have to be given to older women, who have particular needs and who thus require programmes and policies that are sensitive to their situation. In too many cases, women are disadvantaged in terms of their access to education, housing, health care and employment. Their contributions to the economy and society are generally unrecognized and unappreciated. This is the case not only in the home but in the wider

community. Yet in Africa for example, where conflict and the HIV/AIDS virus prevail, the elderly are often forced to assume the role of head of the household when they themselves are in need of care.

It is thus incumbent on policy makers to take account of these factors in order to provide an enabling environment for older persons, particularly women, that would allow them to participate in the development process. In most developing countries, the family has traditionally been the source of support and care for the elderly. Today, however, the institution of the family is often undermined by such trends as migration, the AIDS pandemic, drug abuse and other socio-economic changes. Despite their constraints, Governments, must assume greater responsibilities for the nurture of the aged and protection of the family. However, they can succeed only if other stakeholders in society, including the private sector and community organizations, are willing to assist in sustaining social programmes for the elderly. In this context, the press and other media certainly have a role to play in enhancing public awareness of population ageing and the need to address the issue fully.

The Group of 77 and China calls for increased United Nations activities to address ageing in the context of development. Programmes in the areas of research, training and technical cooperation relating to ageing can contribute to a clearer understanding of available policy options and thereby assist national efforts to achieve global targets on ageing by the turn of the century. Adequate resources must therefore be provided to those United Nations agencies which are concerned with these social issues. At the same time, recognizing that the problems of development must be treated in a comprehensive and holistic fashion, the international community must agree on a closely knit strategy of cooperation aimed at creating better living conditions for all the world's people. Such a strategy would include increased official development assistance flows, debt reduction, investment and trade opportunities, employment and access to health, education and other social benefits, which would allow the disadvantaged societies of developing countries, including their elderly, to advance.

The Group of 77 and China firmly believes that with renewed effort and commitment, we can overcome the hurdles of injustice, inequality and marginalization which exist between and within our societies today. By joining hands and working together, we can truly hope to develop what the Secretary-General has called "a society for all ages".

Mr. Wibisono (Indonesia): I am indeed honoured to address this plenary meeting of the General Assembly on follow-up to the International Year of Older Persons, 1999, under the theme "Towards a society for all ages".

I would first like to express the Indonesian delegation's heartfelt appreciation to you, Mr. President, for your remarks delivered earlier. I should also like to associate my delegation with the statement just delivered by Guyana on behalf of the Group of 77.

Before proceeding, let me express my appreciation to the Deputy Secretary-General for her insightful statement, and also the United Nations Secretariat for the considerable efforts that have gone into the observance of the International Year.

The implications of the ageing of our societies come as no surprise. Indeed, this issue that has been discussed at the United Nations and in many other forums over recent years. It was, thus, that the United Nations convened the World Assembly on Ageing in 1982, the same year in which this body adopted the International Plan of Action on Ageing. Nearly one decade later the continuing discussions on ageing resulted also in the adoption of the United Nations Principles for Older Persons, and soon thereafter of the global targets on ageing for the year 2001. In fact, if I may recall, the International Plan of Action clearly states that the progressive ageing of our societies is neither an unexpected nor an unforeseeable event. It is, rather, a result of worldwide socio-economic development. The advances in science, medicine and technology in the past half century, and especially in the past decade, have greatly increased the average life expectancy, not only for the rich and privileged few, but also for the vast multitudes throughout the world. Global life expectancy has risen 20 years in only four decades. And as the war on disease, malnutrition and poverty continues, as longevity increases, we must rethink our concepts of old age and the challenges of this demographic shift. Not only must we prepare for the inevitable changes that will occur in employment structures, income security and health care, to name a few, but also to achieve the goals set forth in the United Nations Principles for Older Persons and a guarantee that longevity will be accompanied by dignity.

In this regard, the Indonesian delegation would like to welcome and commend the efforts that have been and are being made within the United Nations programme on ageing. The exploration of "wisdom" in a technology-

oriented world, as well as the "competitive advantage" of older persons in the new service-oriented economies, are important initiatives. This approach contributes to defining the role of older persons in society and the contribution they make, as well as addressing the essential question of mainstreaming ageing into social and economic policies and programmes. I would also add that Indonesia is encouraged by the ongoing formulation of a policy framework for a society for all ages, particularly within the context of the contributions to be made to national development.

The challenges ahead are truly complex and multidimensional. For we live in an age not only of increasing longevity, but also one in which the very dynamics of family life are being altered by economic reality. One manifestation of this is the increasing entrance into the workforce of traditional caregivers, which alters the presence of multigenerational support within the family. This, in turn, lends added importance to the need for income security and opportunities for older persons for a decent livelihood. Also, the particular situation of older women needs to be addressed and obstacles to their participation in social and economic development removed.

In my own country, Indonesia, we too have enjoyed the advances leading to increased life expectancy and improved quality of life. And while Indonesia is demographically a youthful society, we nevertheless appreciate fully the long-term implications that the ageing of our society will have for future social and economic policy. With less than 10 per cent of the population considered to be older persons and with a decreased population growth rate, we may anticipate a considerable demographic shift in the coming years.

Despite grappling with the consequences of the economic crisis that has engulfed Indonesia, along with other countries of the region, we remain committed to pursuing effective policies and programmes for older persons, consistent with the goal of society for all ages. In our society and our culture older persons have always been accorded a high degree of respect and deference. Our challenge is therefore to ensure that this attitude is not threatened by the vagaries of economics or the uncertainties of globalization. We need to move even further along the path towards ensuring that older persons fully enjoy independence, participation, care, self-fulfilment and dignity.

Among the activities that have been carried out for older persons within Indonesia is the celebration of a national day, in organizing a celebratory walk involving older persons and in other activities designed to draw attention to this International Year, including held under the theme "*Tua Berguna dan Berkualitas*", which means that older people still have a vital role to play and a contribution to make to national development. This day was proclaimed for the purpose of increasing awareness, improving the welfare of older persons, motivating society to solve problems faced by older persons and improving multi-sectoral cooperation in this effort. At the same time, Indonesia continues to maintain the concept of "three generations under one roof", or what is called more simply the extended family system.

Among other initiatives at the national level, Indonesia's Ministry of Social Affairs has been instrumental in the issuance of new stamps, in organizing a celebratory walk involving older persons and other activities designed to draw attention to this International Year, including the issuance of a brochure to further publicize the goal of the Year. With a limited budget and within the constraints imposed by the current financial situation, Indonesia remains active and effective in addressing this issue.

Let me conclude by noting that for developing countries — which are lacking in social-insurance and social-security systems and rely heavily on family support structures — ensuring the health and well-being of all the citizenry is a constant struggle, in view of our limited means for taking action. At the same time, I firmly believe that if we are to take anything from this International Year, it should be a new perception of older persons. They should not be viewed as the recipients of care or merely as a vulnerable group that must be protected, but as vital resources possessing a lifelong wealth of knowledge and lifelong experiences that should be fully employed in achieving a society for all.

Mr. Rodríguez Parrilla (Cuba) (*spoke in Spanish*): We would like to begin by thanking you, Mr. President, for your words of guidance at the opening of this meeting, and we also appreciate the important contribution made by the Deputy Secretary-General. We want to associate ourselves with the congratulations expressed to Ambassador Julia Alvarez for her important contribution to this issue. We also commend the work of the Group of 77 on this item.

We welcome the decision of the General Assembly to devote four meetings to the problems of older persons, and we believe that this provides a magnificent opportunity for our Organization to analyse with due care

the problems afflicting one of the most vulnerable segments of the population, whose quality of life — or lack thereof — is a representative of the growing disparities throughout our world between the industrialized countries and the third world and between the highest-income groups and the poorest.

The complacency with which the international community has thus far considered the problems of older people and all the surrounding issues has inevitably involved statistical fictions that attempt to show that tangible progress is being made. These statistics overlook the fact that there is another world, the world of the majority, which is not that of the industrialized countries and in which different, often subhuman conditions prevail. This situation needs to be tackled realistically and courageously and resolved efficiently and with solidarity.

The most recent report on global population indicates, in overall terms, that in the past 50 years the average life expectancy of the world's population as a whole has increased by approximately 20 years. The report proposes that, as a result, people in their sixties will make up 11.1 per cent of the total world population by the year 2010. However, we cannot fail to point out that this benefit will not come to everyone equally; nor can we accept passively the idea that the great majority of people in underdeveloped countries are doomed by massive, dire poverty, hunger, poor health and malnutrition not to be a part of these optimistic statistics — but, rather, to be included in the morbidity and mortality statistics characteristic of the less developed regions of the world.

The most illustrative example of this is perhaps the case of Africa. For our African brothers and sisters, average life expectancy at birth is 49 years for men and 51 for women, while in developed Europe the figure is 69 years for men and 77 for women.

How can higher levels be reached when on the African continent 23 million people are suffering from AIDS, when 172 boys and 154 girls out of every thousand are likely to die by the age of five, when infant mortality has reached the astronomical level of 91 children per one thousand live births?

How can we claim that overall statistics give a real picture of the situation in third world countries? What we should really be doing is comparing life expectancy and, above all, quality of life between countries. In African countries, for example, per capita gross domestic product in 1998 was a meagre $1,261, while in opulent Europe that same year, per capita gross domestic product was almost nine times as high: $10,189.

How can we compare the incomparable? In Africa health expenditures represent only 3.2 per cent of gross domestic product, while in Europe that figure is 7.1 per cent — and the gross domestic products of Africa and Europe are hardly comparable.

How could life expectancy at birth in third world countries approach that of the industrialized countries? In the former an astronomical 48 million people die of preventable diseases. In Africa the maternal mortality rate is 940 per 100,000 births, and in South-East Asia the figure is 610 per 100,000 while in Europe the rate is 59 per 100,000.

Another example comes from the 1998 mortality statistics reported by the World Health Organization. A total of 4,695,000 Africans died from infectious and parasitical diseases, including tuberculosis, while for Europeans the figure was only 234,000 — or one twentieth as many. This shameful inequality between developed countries and third world countries is the fundamental reason why only 8.5 per cent of the inhabitants of developing countries will be 60 or older in the year 2000, whereas 19.5 per cent of the population of developed countries — in other words, more than twice the proportion — will have reached that age.

In the majority of the countries of the underdeveloped world the basic concern is therefore not how to deal with all the various aspects of a boom in elderly people, but rather how to ensure that at least a small part of the population can actually reach that stage of life. This is the dilemma of some African countries, where it is painful to see poverty and AIDS, among other scourges, allowing only 3 per cent of their inhabitants to live past the age of 60, while in some European countries 24 per cent of the population is 60 or older.

Some 15 per cent of the populations of the United States and Europe live in so-called islands of poverty in the developed world, where there are amazingly low figures for life expectancy, in some cases similar to those of most third-world countries. Of course, this shocking reality does not mean that we minimize the role of this forum in steering the United Nations to the goal of working towards a well-deserved quality of life for older persons. We agree that this is a basic demand in a large part of the world, and that makes it a reasonable aspiration.

At the same time, however, we firmly believe that successfully meeting the challenge of guaranteeing a life expectancy of at least 60 years in all countries and a regularly declining rate of mortality is an aspiration of equally high priority. It is also essential to redefine, beyond rhetoric, the ways of ageing in order to give real meaning and dignity to the "quality of life" concept for older persons.

We must not fail to give serious and profound consideration to the lack of solidarity suffered by many older persons when family members, especially their children, shirk their responsibilities, and to the isolation, despair and loneliness in which a large number of these older persons must live. This phenomenon is having an ever increasing impact on opulent high-consumption societies.

The vulnerability and social neglect of older persons are especially clear in the segment of the population of industrialized countries that belongs to those islands of poverty. The best-known manifestation of this is the 600,000 homeless that, according to the United States Vice-President, lived in his country in 1997. The non-governmental organizations place that figure at 1 to 3 million people, a large proportion of whom are of the third age.

The follow-up to the International Year of Older Persons is of particular relevance to Cuba. Cuban society attaches the highest priority to this age group, especially at a time when the ageing of a population has become one of the great challenges to a country whose falling birth rate is complemented by a steady decline in mortality and where health services reach the entire population.

We therefore strongly defend the idea, reflected in Cuban social policy, that older persons need increasing opportunities and support systems in various areas and with greater urgency. This includes the generation of income, social security and comprehensive care. Satisfactory ageing is not just a legitimate aspiration of human beings, but also an indicator of development and good health.

In this respect, we were delighted by the successful convening of the GENTOVIDA '99 event, which concluded last Friday in Havana and included the third Latin American congress of the International Association of Gerontology and the second Ibero-American meeting of older persons. Specialists and older persons themselves made important contributions to the great endeavour of improving the quality of life of older persons and enhancing the gerontology culture.

For Cuba, the subject of older persons is of high priority. Currently, 13.6 per cent of the Cuban population — approximately 1.3 million inhabitants — is 60-years old or older. By the year 2025, it is forecast that one of every four Cubans will be over the age of 60. The reality of our population is the basic result of our Government's ongoing deep-seated social policy to guarantee universal and free health care, hospitalization and social security for all older persons. This is an important cause of the rise in life expectancy at birth to 75 years.

Among the programmes designed to improve health and social-care indicators for older persons is one for older adults that ensures special medical care to that broad segment of the population, as well as social care for older persons on their own. This is aimed at targeting sufficient attention to and promoting an independent life and full participation in social life for those who need society's support and care. Furthermore, pension expenditure is rising at an annual rate of 4.5 per cent, while the number of pensioners is increasing by 2.4 per cent a year. 12.6 per cent of our population benefits from this system. Cuba currently pays 1.3 million pensions for retirement, disability and death benefits.

We are also working to improve adult education, to create a university chair for the third age and to broaden the dissemination of information on the problems and concerns of that segment of our population. Given the foreseeable demand, we are already planning future training of the labour force and broadening medical and geriatric services.

There have been many obstacles to the development of this social policy. The economic war waged by the Government of the United States against Cuba, including the four-decade economic, financial and trade blockade that has intensified in recent years, has had a particularly negative impact on older persons, who form an especially vulnerable group, by limiting, *inter alia*, their consumption of the special food and medication they require.

We are aware that achieving the "society for all ages" advocated by the United Nations is a major challenge, particularly to the third-world countries, which often lack the resources to develop social programmes to improve the quality of life of the population in general

aid of older persons in particular, especially because of the application of structural adjustment policies, the impact of financial crises and the reduction of official development assistance. It is necessary for solidarity and cooperation to prevail so that mortality can decline, life expectancy rise and the population age with dignity in the developing countries.

In this respect, Cuba is prepared, as always, to contribute to this objective, of course without any consideration of economic benefit whatsoever. In one group of countries in Africa, a fraternal continent in great need, about 200 Cuban physicians are providing services. This figure will soon rise and does not include physicians working under contract, of whom there are 400 in South African villages. In the new programme of entirely free services that we are providing to the poorest countries of Africa with the most difficult health conditions, no fewer than 3,000 Cuban physicians are available to the inhabitants.

In Central America and the Caribbean, we are still developing our comprehensive health plan, through which 1,200 of our physicians and health-care specialists are providing care absolutely free.

The industrialized countries could cooperate by providing medication in the struggle to save and prolong life in these needy areas of the third world.

Furthermore, 2,000 students are training as physicians in the Latin American School of Medicine, an initiative aimed at providing better medical care in neighbouring countries. In coming months, the School will have 3,000 students, and 6,000 in three years. Similarly, we are promoting the establishment of medical schools with Cuban teachers to provide free training for health-care workers in the field in Africa.

May I conclude my statement by expressing my conviction that, in order to increase life expectancy, improve health-care indicators and the quality of social life, and successfully confront the very specific problems of older persons, it is crucial to have an international economic order that is just, fair and sustainable and makes it possible for these challenges to be met, regardless of the difficulty of surrounding circumstances.

Ms. Hönigsperger (Austria): Let me start by stressing that Austria fully endorses the statement which was delivered on this agenda item by the Presidency of the European Union.

The International Year of Older Persons has been and continues to be a welcome occasion for Austria to redirect and anchor its policy on older persons in the public consciousness in line with the United Nations Principles for Older Persons.

Austria defined the goals of the International Year of Older Persons at a very early stage, at the start of 1998, and established an Austrian National Committee to Prepare and Implement the International Year of Older Persons, chaired by the Federal Minister of Environment, Youth and Family Affairs. The Committee comprises all governmental and non-governmental institutions active in this field in order to achieve the widest possible participation.

In Austria, the core objectives in implementing the Year are defined as follows: appreciation of old age as an equal third life-cycle stage; encouragement of dialogue and interaction between the generations; active inclusion of older persons in society and politics; and the promotion of voluntary work by older persons through the establishment of community centres for these activities.

In implementing the International Year of Older Persons, Austria puts great emphasis on achieving maximum awareness and participation of its citizens, as well as on measures to foster and improve policies targeting older persons. The challenge of an ageing society is being addressed in more than a thousand events and initiatives. At the same time, targeted and sustained action is being taken at the political level. Let me highlight a number of these initiatives.

The International Year of Older Persons was launched in Austria on 1 October 1998 with the observation of the International Day of Older Persons. The day was guided by the motto "Dialogue between generations — action day for a better understanding between the generations". More than 300 events were organized on this Action Day throughout the country, ranging from counselling on free health care to platforms devoted to the dialogue between generations.

We also initiated several competitions aimed at the implementation of the goals of the Year. One competition, at the community level, awards projects and initiatives which encourage the implementation of the concept of solidarity between generations.

The Austrian State Award for Family-Oriented Journalism reflects the motto of the International Year: "Towards a society for all ages".

In April 1999, the Federal Ministry of Environment, Youth and Family Affairs and the Federal Ministry of Education and Cultural Affairs jointly launched a competition evaluating long-term projects devoted to the issue of intergenerational dialogue. The competition targets students and youth organizations, as well as older persons who wish to interact with the young generation.

Within the scope of the Austrian National Committee, we also initiated seven working groups to develop and improve a comprehensive policy on older persons for my country, engaging more than 500 actors. It is their responsibility to analyse future challenges regarding the trend of an ageing society and to develop a sound basis for sustainable long-term programmes.

For the first time in Austria, a comprehensive scientific study on the situation of older persons was prepared this year. The findings of this study will guide our work in the future. The report provides concrete information on the housing situation, lifestyles, family networks, health care and societal participation of older persons in Austria. This initiative is based on the United Nations recommendation to study and analyse the situation of senior citizens. The first Austrian report on older persons will be submitted to the Austrian Parliament for discussion towards the end of the year.

One of our major concerns regarding the implementation of the goals defined by the International Year of Older Persons is appreciation for voluntary work. Older citizens should be offered opportunities and options for active and independent enjoyment of life at the third stage. Our model project of centres for voluntary work gives momentum to voluntary social activities at the community level. There is a lively demand for these platforms, which foster intergenerational dialogue. We will continue our efforts to develop a new culture of volunteers, including for the young population. This initiative should also be seen in the context of the International Year of Volunteers, which will be observed in 2001.

In order to enhance the participation of older persons in society, we launched an initiative at the local level which should open new opportunities for older persons to design their environment in an active manner. Local mayors and senior citizens are the target group for these activities aimed at the development of new modalities of representation for senior citizens.

In order to improve the protection and promotion of the rights of older persons, the Federal Ministry of Environment, Youth and Family Affairs appointed a Federal ombudsperson. This institution acts as a focal point for all legal concerns of older persons, giving special attention to the needs of senior citizens living in residences for the elderly.

As a preliminary resume of Austrian events and initiatives organized within the scope of the Year, we can distinguish the following trend: an ageing society is receiving increasing attention in the context of social policies in Austria. This achievement is complemented by an increase in reports by the Austrian media on issues related to older persons.

We have also been able to present convincing arguments for reorienting the paradigms of policies targeting older persons towards the United Nations Principles for Older Persons. In this regard, we take concrete action in redirecting the relevant Austrian policies through numerous measures that receive considerable attention from the public.

Austria would like to stress that the United Nations International Year of Older Persons has triggered a major momentum for a broad and in-depth discussion on the situation of older persons. We believe that the Year enhances opportunities for our senior citizens to participate in society and shapes the image of older persons in a positive way.

In this context, we wish to pay tribute to the dedication and determination of Ambassador Julia Alvarez, who made the Year a reality.

In following up on the results of International Year of Older Persons, we will continue to pursue these objectives, with a view to their sustained implementation.

Mr. Larraín (Chile) (*spoke in Spanish*): We celebrated the International Day of Older Persons on 1 October, and we reaffirmed our commitment to the Vienna International Plan of Action on Ageing, adopted in 1982 at the World Assembly on Ageing. That Plan of Action is a clear example of how an organized international community can contribute decisively to efficiently dealing with subjects which are the daily concern of our peoples.

Nonetheless, the vital momentum given to this subject by the United Nations would be of no significance without the effective commitment of national Governments to implement the recommendations of the Plan of Action. In this context, my Government is pleased to report that in 1990 Chile began a series of actions aimed at dealing systematically and comprehensively with the situation of older persons. In that year, the department of policies for priority groups set up, within the social division of the Ministry of Planning, to design a national strategy in this field. Following a diagnostic process, in 1993 the Chilean Government adopted a national ageing and old age policy and established the National Committee for the older adult, with its respective regional committees, with the aim of studying formulas for implementing that national policy. This process has become particularly important in our country because the analysis of demographic trends and projections shows characteristics of an advanced stage of demographic transition, a stage in which Chile finds itself. Beginning with the period 1995-2000, these characteristics translate into a decrease in natural annual population growth, together with the continued ageing of the population already begun in earlier decades. Statistics also show that the ageing trend has a more marked impact on the female population, especially in rural areas of our country.

That makes even more urgent the need indicated in the Equal Opportunity Plan for Chilean Women 1994-1999 to formulate policies and programmes having regard to the specific circumstances of older women. Those circumstances include the metabolic degenerative problems peculiar to women's biology and psychological problems stemming from lack of social recognition, such as the fact that a higher proportion of older women are poor and heads of household, or have a dependent status.

Specific women's programmes go hand in hand with special programmes to increase and improve services for older persons who are poor and to encourage them to take part in social life. As a result, in the decade now drawing to a close Chile has reduced the proportion of over-60s living in poverty from 20.4 per cent to 10 per cent.

Among the programmes that we have established we can highlight the following.

With regard to health, there are five ongoing programmes to resolve the nutrition, education and self-care problems of the elderly and to provide education for a healthy life.

In the area of housing, there are programmes to rehabilitate dwellings for poor older people and meet basic housing needs.

On social development, 13 programmes are being implemented to improve the living conditions of the older population. In this sphere, the Solidarity and Social Investment Fund has since 1996 developed a programme entitled "More life for your years", which is aimed at poor persons over 65. This programme in turn has two components. The first, called "Services for the older person", is to provide services at the community level and facilitate access to existing public services within and outside the community level. The second makes available to organizations of older persons small funds, for which competitive application must be made, to implement their own initiatives.

In the area of education and training, there have been programmes geared to the cultural recreation of older persons and to training in written and oral skills.

Lastly, I would like to place on record that the beginning of the International Year of Older Persons was celebrated in Chile with the convening of a fourth large gathering of older persons, a three-day event, with the theme "Living life". In addition, 1 October has been officially designated the Day of the Older Person, and the whole of October has been designated the Month of the Older Person.

Furthermore, the theme of the International Year, "Towards a society for all ages", has been interpreted by my country as an invitation to work for the elimination of all forms of discrimination against older persons in our society. Thus, the main objective of our national policy for the older person is to achieve a cultural change resulting in better treatment of older persons. This is an endeavour involving all social actors in the country.

I have given a brief account of the concrete actions being taken by the Chilean Government to improve the living conditions of older persons, honouring the commitment solemnly made in Vienna 18 years ago. In this respect, the Chilean Government considers it essential to continue the work of our Organization on the subject of ageing, work which is being efficiently guided by the Secretariat in the right direction.

We will soon be celebrating the twentieth anniversary of the Vienna International Plan of Action on Ageing, and the Government of Chile believes that on

that occasion — in 2002 — the international community will have to meet to analyse the progress made and set long-term guidelines and strategies for the coming years, years which, demographic trends indicate, will be characterized by a continuous ageing of our population.

Mr. Maravall (Spain) (*spoke in Spanish*): While fully supporting the statement made today by Finland on behalf of the European Union, my delegation wishes to make this additional statement to share our national experience regarding the International Year of Older Persons and the activities needed for its satisfactory follow-up.

In Spain the International Year was a decisive catalyst for greater attention by our society to the situation of older persons and questions related to ageing. It also generated many activities, debates and proposals which we consider to be of great interest and to which I will briefly refer.

It is also important to point out that the International Year significantly promoted the associations of older persons movement in Spain, especially through the State Council of Older Persons.

As we reported last February during the meeting of the Commission for Social Development, at the end of 1997 we established the National Coordination Committee for the International Year of Older Persons. This Committee, presided over by the Minister of Labour and Social Affairs, includes all the non-governmental organizations represented on the State Council of Older Persons; representatives of each of the 17 Regional Councils of Older Persons; representatives of non-governmental organizations of a general nature; representatives of universities, foundations linked to major corporations and financial entities; and lastly, representatives of State, regional and local government. At the beginning of this year, coinciding with the beginning of the International Year, the Committee started a programme of activities for the Year which eventually amounted to more than a thousand celebrations and activities related to the International Year at all levels, from local to national, including autonomous communities.

The national activities, in addition to a publicity campaign on the International Year and other measures to publicize it, included a campaign to promote volunteer activities by older persons and an evaluation of the National Gerontology Plan, an integrated part of our policy for older persons, adopted in 1991 for the decade. This evaluation showed both positive aspects and important achievements, but also considerable shortcomings, which we are working on to rectify them in a new plan.

Among the advances made during this period, we would highlight the following: the universalization and improvement of public pensions; improvements in preventive health and hygiene programmes; a considerable growth in residential care provision for older persons, help provided at home and from outside; the development of quality of life programmes; subsidized travel and health spa visits, as well as transport adapted to their needs and the removal of barriers to mobility in buildings; the establishment of programmes for older persons in many universities; and a significant change in the public image of older persons, in particular attitudes of and towards older women.

As regards the shortcomings, three fields are under particular consideration: the priority that should be given to caring for dependent older persons, especially victims of Alzheimer's disease and other dementia; the need to promote flexible and diversified programmes to support families caring for older persons; and the need to promote comprehensive social welfare and health programmes.

I should like to mention another aspect relating to our social security system. Ways of making retirement more flexible, better adapted to the new realities of older persons, are also on the agenda of our national debate, to which the International Year has contributed new and interesting perspectives. It must be said that the attitudes of older persons towards ageing and of society towards older persons, has changed; today a 65-year-old person in Spain cannot in general be considered elderly, inactive or sick. If to this we add a considerable rise in life expectancy — approximately 80 years on average in our country, particularly for women — we can easily understand the need to adapt our legislation on retirement to these changes, promoting more flexible formulas in our social security system.

Within our national experience, I would highlight an important agreement that was signed two weeks ago between the Spanish Government and the unions on an increase and improvement in pensions. I would highlight also that Spain has promoted a master's degree course in social gerontology in Brazil for Ibero-American professionals and has co-funded the Congress of Networks of Older Adults in Argentina.

Although the International Year of Older Persons will not come to an end until December, we can already say that it has more than amply lived up to the initial expectations. The International Year has generated considerable interest in ageing-related issues and the situation of older persons by giving these subjects a new dimension in which the fundamental approach does not focus on dependency but rather on the potential of older persons as active agents for development in our societies. We are attempting to formalize this concept around the expression "active and healthy ageing".

In its resolution 37/2, the Commission for Social Development requested the Secretary-General to solicit the opinions of States, non-governmental organizations and the private sector on updating the International Plan of Action on Ageing and on the desirability and feasibility of convening in the year 2002 a review of the outcome of the World Assembly on Ageing including the interrelationship of ageing and development. This consultation, which concerns various steps to be taken in the next few years to provide proper follow-up to the International Year of Older Persons is, we believe, very opportune.

More specifically, in response to the questions posed in resolution 37/2, I wish first of all to reiterate that Spain is in favour of convening in the year 2002, a global conference to review the results of the first World Assembly on Ageing in Vienna 1982. We believe that this gathering in 2002, which could be called the Second World Assembly on Ageing, should be a basic element in International Year follow-up activities. It should enable us to formulate a long-term strategy on ageing taking into account the most recent trends in the ageing process in our society, and their implications; in this, the concept of a society for all ages must be the touchstone.

We also believe that the interrelations between ageing and development — as the Commission for Social Development rightly pointed out — must be fully explored, and in this respect we believe that a Second World Assembly on Ageing should pay particular attention to the problems of ageing in the developing countries. These problems are not the exclusive concern of those countries alone; they are also matters of global interest.

In the light of all these considerations, it also seems to us that work should begin on updating the International Plan of Action on Ageing. The results of the updating process — which would fall to the Commission for Social Development to carry out — would also bring us to a global meeting in 2002.

For all these reasons, and bearing in mind that ageing-related issues and policies for older persons are priority considerations in our country, Spain has expressed its desire, if there is a consensus on convening the Second World Assembly on Ageing in 2002, to offer itself as host. This offer was included in the statement by our Minister for Foreign Affairs in the general debate, and we reaffirm it now.

Lastly, Spain believes that greater global attention must be given to ageing-related issues in the various international forums. We should be aware that we are talking about an issue that mainly affected the developing countries when the International Plan of Action on Ageing was adopted in 1982, but is increasingly becoming a concern for all countries. These considerations are also behind our offer to host the meeting in 2002. We hope that there will soon be a consensus decision to accept our offer.

Mr. Nuanthasing (Lao People's Democratic Republic): Population ageing has not become one of the world's more alarming issues, and, if not properly dealt with, the problem over the next century could be worse. According to United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA) demographic data, the number of older persons aged 60 or over is estimated at nearly 600 million this year — 1999 — and is projected to grow to 1.9 billion by 2050, when the number of older persons will be as large as the number of children in the world.

In 1982, the World Assembly on Ageing convened by the United Nations adopted an International Plan of Action on Ageing. Furthermore, at its forty-sixth session, the General Assembly adopted the United Nations Principles for Older Persons (resolution 46/91, annex). As a basis for formulating national policies on ageing, the International Plan of Action and the United Nations Principles set a series of objectives and targets for the world community to achieve in dealing with this issue.

Both the International Plan of Action on Ageing and the United Nations Principles for Older Persons have been accepted by Member States as general guidelines for national actions. However, different countries have different ways of meeting the targets outlined in the International Plan of Action based on their economic, social, cultural and religious realities. In the case of Laos, our society advocates strong family ties. According to our culture and tradition, the family has the primary responsibility to take care of its older members. By this we do not mean that the Government has no

responsibility for older persons: on the contrary, as a matter of policy the Government is doing everything humanly possible to help families take care of their own older persons.

Ministries, provincial and district authorities and other Government bodies are also obliged to take care of their retired and older people. The Government has provided Ministries and provincial authorities with funds to build retirement communities. In other cases, the Government assists older people by supplying construction materials which they can use to build their houses as they wish. The national pension is another source of income for older people, and in public hospitals, older people also receive medical treatment free or at reduced cost. Many achievements have been made, but much remains to be done; the Government is determined to take further steps to enhance the quality of life of older persons.

In preparation for the observance of the International Year of Older Persons, a national committee was established. The Committee is composed of Government agencies — the Ministry of Labour and Social Welfare and the Ministry of Public Health — and the Lao Women's Union, the Lao Front for National Construction and the National Retirement Club.

In celebration of the International Year, in Vientiane the Committee has organized seminars, conferences and training courses for trainers in caring for the elderly. At the beginning of the year, a campaign of medical checkups for older people was conducted in many cities around the country. Also a meeting and peace walk in honour of older persons, concerts and sporting events, handicraft exhibitions and shows of traditional Lao fashions were included in the programme organized this year in the capital city, Vientiane, and in many provincial cities. All these activities are aimed at raising public awareness of ageing issues under the theme "Towards a society for all ages". Through these events we very much hope to strengthen the inter-generational relationship in our society.

The celebration of the International Year of Older Persons this year provides a good opportunity for the Member States to cooperate closely with the United Nations system, to exchange experiences and to take home relevant ideas and policies which can be realized in their home countries. It is my delegation's hope that the outcome of our two-day debate will contribute to efforts to formulate an action-oriented strategy on ageing for the new millennium. In this spirit, all countries the world over should unite their efforts and find effective ways to build a true society for all ages, a society that all people, including older persons, can benefit from.

Mr. Satoh (Japan): At the outset, I would like to commend you, Mr. President, for providing us with an important opportunity to follow up the International Year of Older Persons. I would also like to join in expressing sincere appreciation to Ambassador Alvarez of the Dominican Republic, who played a major part in the effort to put the issue of older persons on the international agenda.

We are pleased to be able to celebrate the International Year of Older Persons in this last year before the new millennium. The theme of the Year, "Towards a society for all ages," underscores the importance of strengthening solidarity between human beings of every generation, and this valuable idea will have to be further mainstreamed in the new millennium.

As is often stressed, if the elderly are well cared for and empowered in the process of ageing, this could provide a broad range of opportunities, both in individuals' lives and for society. The unprecedented increase in longevity, together with technological innovation and globalization, would make it possible for us to realize "active ageing", in which older persons participate in a wide range of domestic as well as international activities. This would lead us to the realization of a true "society for all ages".

What we have to do now and in the coming years is to maximize our efforts both in advancing the empowerment of older persons and in increasing opportunities for older persons to participate. Needless to say, caring for older persons must be a central part of this concept of a "society for all ages".

While Governments, central as well as local, must take leadership in these efforts, the roles to be played by civil society and volunteers as well as the media are essential for the success of this endeavour. Networking and partnership among these players and cooperation between them and Governments are critically important in order to realize a "society for all ages".

Ageing is an issue of increasing importance to Japan. Our society is ageing at an unprecedented speed, faster than any other in the world. Today one out of six Japanese is 65 or older, and it is expected that in 2050 one third of the population will be 65 or older. And in social environments wherein parents and younger couples

live separately, caring for older persons is a matter that must be addressed by society as a whole.

In order to cope with this issue, the Japanese Parliament enacted in 1995 the Basic Law on Measures for an Ageing Society, which provides for necessary measures to be taken, with independence and solidarity as guiding principles. Obviously, this reflects the United Nations Principles for Older Persons.

In order to achieve the purpose of this law, the Government of Japan is now working to strengthen partnerships with local Governments and non-governmental organizations. The Japan Non-Governmental Organization Conference was also established in October last year for the purpose of promoting cooperation among non-governmental organizations engaged in activities related to ageing. In addition, numerous events have been held by concerned organizations as well as by many local Governments during this International Year of Older Persons.

The Japanese Government is also working to create a new social security system of long-term care insurance which is aimed at ensuring the necessary services for those who require long-term care.

Internationally, the then Japanese Prime Minister, Ryutaro Hashimoto, proposed the "Initiative for a Caring World" at the G-7 Lyon summit in 1996, with a view to promoting the concept of "active ageing". Subsequently, Japan convened a series of conferences, including the East Asian Ministerial Meeting on Caring Societies, held in December 1997, and a meeting of high-level officials, held in January last year. Japan also sponsored in April last year an international symposium entitled "Health Initiatives in the Asian Economic Crisis" in order to help alleviate the negative impacts the East Asian financial crisis had caused on health care in the countries involved. This was in addition to the financial support Japan had provided to the countries hit by the financial crisis.

Japan also provides training to officials from developing countries who are responsible for the administration of social security systems. In September this year, Japan held an international symposium on "active ageing" in Tokyo.

Increased efforts by us all are required in order for us to attain the goal of realizing a "society for all ages". As pointed out by the Secretary-General in his report, we have to pursue this goal from a multidimensional perspective, taking into account not only the situation of older persons but also life-long individual development, multigenerational relationships and the interplay of population ageing and development. In this context, my delegation welcomes the ongoing effort by the Secretariat to prepare a long-term strategy on ageing, which will be discussed at the fifty-sixth session of the General Assembly.

Japan, for its part, is advocating that the international community devote greater attention to human security as we enter the next millennium. By human security, we mean protecting human beings' safety and dignity from all sorts of threats, ranging from poverty, conflict and climate change to drugs and infectious diseases. Older persons, who are vulnerable to each one of these threats, must be the primary beneficiaries of this policy approach that we are advocating.

In recognizing this, I would like to reaffirm the determination of the Japanese Government to do its utmost to create a society for all ages, both nationally and internationally.

Mr. Chaouachi (Tunisia) (*spoke in French*): Tunisia is happy to join the international community today in celebrating the International Year of Older Persons. My country welcomes the fact that 1999 — the last year of the century — is being celebrated under the banner of social solidarity to promote a society for all ages. This year is a milestone in making all the nations of the world aware of the importance of the phenomenon of the ageing of the population. Tunisia associates itself with the statement made by the representative of Guyana on behalf of the Group of 77.

The profound economic and social changes that have taken place in the world during this century, and the progress made in science and technology, particularly in the medical field, have had beneficial effects, improving people's lives and, in the past 50 years, increasing life expectancy by 20 years.

Such longevity is new terrain for humanity, and we must all explore and discover it together. We must prepare ourselves to confront this new challenge so that we can promote good living conditions for older people.

In this context, the 1982 Vienna International Plan of Action on Ageing and resolution 46/91 of 16 December 1991, which set out the Principles of the

United Nations aimed at enabling older people better to enjoy their extended years, remain the preferred point of reference for guiding our policies and actions in this area. We must ensure independence for older people, guarantee their full participation in social activities, provide for their needs and foster their personal growth while preserving their dignity.

Tunisia would like to emphasize the existing link between ageing and development. We believe that it is difficult to guarantee older people a tranquil old age in societies that are suffering from poverty and that, in addition, are being ravaged by armed conflicts and natural disasters. In this respect, Tunisia calls for international solidarity so as to put an end to the existing disparities between the rich and poor countries, between those with sufficient resources to provide their citizens with a happy old age and enough to live on, and those whose meagre resources are insufficient to meet adequately the many needs of their people, especially the elderly.

In order to strengthen the bonds of solidarity, the President of the Republic of Tunisia, Mr. Zine El Abidine Ben Ali has proposed to the international community the creation of a world solidarity fund, which would collect voluntary contributions for development projects in the poorest regions.

Tunisia's social policy gives priority to older persons. Such an attitude is not new, and stems from the fundamental values that underpin our social fabric. Indeed, in our society, as in many others, older people have always been an invaluable resource to whom families and society as a whole pledge respect, love and affection. That attitude was consolidated by law number 94-114 of 31 October 1994, on the protection of older persons, which is a bill of rights for older people. It is designed to strengthen family solidarity and home care for such individuals, improve institutional assistance to them and provide them with necessary health-care coverage.

My country has implemented a strategy for the protection of older people based on, first, ensuring social support through security funds; second, providing material assistance at home for those in need; third, providing material assistance for families that take in older persons in need who lack family support; fourth, creating mobile, multidisciplinary teams to provide home medical care for older people; fifth, implementing a programme to improve conditions for taking care of and protecting older people in centres for the elderly; sixth, free treatment and hospital care in public health institutions for all older people in need; seventh, arranging for the creation and running of private facilities for the protection of the elderly; and, eighth, setting up medical-school diploma courses in geriatrics.

In the framework of its ninth economic and social development plan, which is currently in effect, Tunisia has also set out a strategy to protect older persons. This consists of consolidating the activities of associations working with the elderly, strengthening work in the specialized medical and paramedical areas, validating the role of older people by benefiting from their experience and knowledge and providing permanent assistance to 3,100 vulnerable older people in the context of the national programme for the protection of older people.

Mr. Pennekamp (Netherlands): The Netherlands fully supports the statement made by the European Union (EU) Presidency. Allow me to make a national statement as a complement to that statement.

On the eve of the twenty-first century, great changes are taking place throughout the world. Globalization, technological advances and an ageing population affect us all. The common factor in all of these changes is that they have an impact on our economic, social and cultural structure. By 2020, we expect there to be 1 billion older people in the world, 700 million of them in developing countries. But how will they — perhaps I should say, "we" — live? What will they live on? Who will look after them? And how can we stop many of them from becoming marginalized and excluded?

As we look at the economic and social developments in the world, the issue of a policy for older people has everything to do with their opportunities for social integration, participation and independence. Of course, a country can deliver only the social welfare system it can afford. I agree with the World Bank that there is no standard recipe. Little can be achieved without work, a secure income, adequate housing and good health. None of those elements can exist without certain financial and economic conditions.

In the Netherlands, we have shown that market-based economic policies and comprehensive social welfare policies can coexist successfully and that they are in fact two sides of the same coin. If people of all ages are to be active members of society, we have to invest in an affordable pension system, housing, social welfare and a health-care system.

A competitive world does not have to be a world of growing inequality, social instability, and structural unemployment. Dutch policy demonstrates this clearly. Like many other countries, we have to cope with social problems that primarily affect the more vulnerable groups in society, such as the frail and the very old. Fewer than half of the very old live in homes for the elderly; of those over 65, only 8 per cent reside in a home for the elderly or a nursing home. In our policy, living independently is far more important than institutionalized care. Nevertheless, people's everyday problems demand specific remedies which, in the Netherlands at least, have to be delivered at the local or regional level.

Those who are in need of care or adapted housing are enabled to live independently thanks to well coordinated services such as home care and adapted housing, or to volunteers and informal care. All this entails a crucial role for local authorities, local services and citizens in the area — of course, including older people themselves. In a society for all ages, people have to be able to participate fully, and should not have to not face discrimination or other barriers to obtaining work, income, housing or care. No one should be excluded from society because of discrimination on the grounds of age, handicap or any other ground.

Age discrimination is the focus of much attention in the Netherlands. At the national level, we do everything possible to fight it, for instance by supporting such organizations as the National Bureau against Age Discrimination, and by setting non-discrimination as a condition for financial support in fields such as sports.

A society for all ages is all about people, both as individuals and in groups. It is a society that encourages human achievement and promotes both social and economic participation and integration. To sustain a society for all ages, we have to make long-term investments in our human capital. In the technology-based society of the future, education and the notion of life-long learning will be prime conditions for participation, for both young and old. To give an example, one of the high points of the International Year of Older Persons in the Netherlands was Generations Day, held on the first day of summer. This was a chance for young and old to meet, exchange thoughts and work together.

But the Netherlands Government is not concerned merely with what goes on within our own national borders. Population ageing is a worldwide phenomenon that has long affected more than the industrialized countries. In many developing countries, the standard of living has improved greatly, thanks mainly to the efforts of older people themselves. More people than ever are now living in peace and prosperity. Fewer children are dying; more people are surviving into old age; and women now have more say about how many children they will bear. These are all benefits of sustained social and economic development. However, we cannot deny the potential gravity of the economic, financial and social impact of an ageing world population. Solutions are not easy to come up with. Some people regard this as one of the greatest challenges likely to face us in the first century of the new millennium, especially in the many developing countries where the proportion of older people is growing much faster than in the industrialized countries. In those countries, growing old usually means growing old and poor; only a few older people have access to social welfare, and traditional family-based care for the old is steadily being eroded.

Even in a highly developed social welfare system such as that in our country, we still need traditional informal care. This is exemplified by the large number of volunteers and informal care-givers active in this field. And since older people will continue to suffer from failing health, we have to focus on providing them, earlier in life, with advice, preventive care, health education and, most of all, access to basic medical services. Inspired by the International Year of Older Persons, my ministry, the Ministry of Health, Welfare and Sport, and the Ministry of Foreign Affairs have submitted a joint memorandum to the Dutch Parliament entitled "Ageing and Development". That document, summaries of which my delegation has made available to members, aims to draw attention to the ageing of the world's population and its impact on developing countries. And it underscores the prime objective of international policy on older people: their full participation and integration in society. Regard for older people — and especially for the strengths, experience and contributions that the elderly can give to society — should be an essential part of our policy. That is why the Dutch Government considers it important that we learn from each other how to encourage people to stay active in later life.

Learning from each other's policies and best practices is potentially a very useful instrument. To make it work, the Netherlands Government is funding a United Nations database, accessible on the Internet, containing information and public responses to population and ageing policy issues in different areas. The annex to the

written version of my speech provides details on how to access the database, which is at present under construction, along with a sample of its content. I am fully confident that together we will make a success of it.

Ultimately it is not primarily for Governments but for people themselves to shape this society which we have come to call during the past thematic year a society for all ages. The future is in their hands; unless people, young and old, have a chance to be active members of society, there is a real danger that their commitment will be stifled and that their valuable contribution to building a better society will be lost.

Ms. Wilson (Canada): Canada welcomes the opportunity to present a summary of Canada's record in relation to the International Year of Older Persons. We congratulate the Secretary-General on highlighting a variety of activities undertaken by Governments and by civil society, which provide useful examples for all of us. As well, his report sets out in a comprehensive way key markers for future activities of the United Nations programme on ageing, offering useful guidance and challenging ideas for future consideration. We also thank those individuals and Governments that contributed to the expert consultation and report.

Like other rapidly ageing societies, Canada has an important stake in the International Year of Older Persons. Our senior population, which today makes up 12 per cent of Canada's total population, will account for close to 25 per cent of all Canadians by 2041. The International Year of Older Persons has cast the spotlight on the challenges and opportunities of an ageing Canadian society. The policy initiatives undertaken by Canada this year are part of a broad, ongoing and forward-looking agenda begun several years ago. That agenda builds on Canada's strong social programmes, which include a multi-pillared retirement income system and a national health insurance programme accessible to Canadians of all ages.

Two years ago, Canada introduced reforms to the Canada pension plan that assure its fairness across generations and its financial sustainability for the future, while keeping benefits to pensioners fundamentally intact. In February 1999, Canada was able to devote new resources to the health sector. Initiatives were introduced to strengthen health services and to improve the readiness of the health system for an ageing population. Important investments have been made to enhance the quality and accessibility of health services, to encourage the development and application of new technologies in health and to stimulate research on key health concerns.

To respond to the challenges of ageing, the federal, provincial and territorial ministers responsible for seniors have agreed on a national framework on ageing to guide all jurisdictions and sectors in the development of policies, programmes and services for seniors. As part of this work, ministers approved a set of core policy principles which were inspired by the United Nations Principles for Older Persons and which were endorsed by seniors in consultations across the country. These Canadian policy principles are: dignity, independence, participation, fairness and security.

Canada's International Year of Older Persons efforts got under way last year when our federal, provincial and territorial Ministers responsible for seniors established a special body — the Canada Coordinating Committee for the International Year of Older Persons — to oversee the planning and implementation of initiatives across the country. The Committee included members from every province and territory, representing a broad spectrum of society, including aboriginal persons and persons with disabilities.

Among the many initiatives undertaken this year, Canada was pleased to host the Fourth Global Conference of the International Federation on Ageing, which took place last month in Montreal. This conference was the largest ever, with representation from 60 nations, including ministers with portfolios dealing with ageing, or seniors, from 30 countries. The Montreal Declaration emerged from this conference. The Declaration reviews the status of older persons around the world and reaffirms the 1991 United Nations Principles for Older Persons. It also calls on the United Nations to continue the momentum generated by the International Year of Older Persons.

Throughout 1999 Canadians young and old have worked together on events, projects and celebrations that are helping to establish a legacy of inter-generational understanding. Some of these will continue. For example, the Generations CAN Connect project intends to build bridges between seniors and youth using information and communication technologies, including the involvement of youth interviewing seniors about significant memories and posting them on the Internet.

The thrust of Canada's public policy for an ageing society is to ensure that our social programmes are

sustainable and fair, and to promote good health throughout the life course for all Canadians. We know that we need to devote greater attention to reducing the disparities in health and well-being affecting certain groups in our older population, such as seniors with low incomes, older women living alone and aboriginal seniors.

(*spoke in French*)

Our country's challenge for the remainder of 1999 and beyond is to build on the momentum of the past nine months to ensure that the legacy of the International Year of Older Persons is a strong and enduring one.

The President: We have heard the last speaker for this meeting.

I should like to remind Members that, as announced earlier at this meeting, statements for these four plenary meetings should not exceed 10 minutes. In view of the large number of speakers on the list, I strongly urge speakers to adhere to the 10-minute guideline.

The meeting rose at 1.05 p.m.